

Query Letters & Published Samples

A compilation of articles
and the queries that sold them

ALYICE EDRICH

 The
Dabbling
Mum
www.thedabblingmum.com

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About the Author



Alyce Edrich is a small business entrepreneur, content writer, and mixed media artist.

From 2000 to 2013 she ran an award-winning online magazine known as The Dabbling Mum®. It was a place of refuge for very *BUSY* moms who wanted to find their place in the world without losing sight of what really mattered to them—their families. It was also a place where moms could feel comfortable with the choices they made, and the changes they wanted to make, and not feel guilty because they were not living up to someone else's ideals.

Today, she runs The Dabbling Mum® as an online bookstore and art shop designed to spread a little sunshine and joy to every creative woman she meets.

To contact Alyce, visit her website at thedabblingmum.com or send an email to: dm@thedabblingmum.com

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What Is A Query Letter?

A query letter is, in my opinion, a sales pitch. Query letters are letters of introduction. They are resumes that showcase a writer's talent, experience, and qualification. Query letters are the first step to receiving an assignment from an editor you've never worked with before. Query letters are the necessary evil.

While query letters can often take as much time to prepare and write, as having completed the assignment itself, they do help editors perform their jobs better. By reading, skimming, or glancing over a query letter, an editor can weed out potential candidates and find the correct writing style and writer for the piece he (or she) needs.

New writers often have concerns about querying magazine editors, and those concerns often stop writers dead in their tracks—preventing them from moving forward with their dreams of becoming a published writer. This e-book was created to encourage those writers (yes, that's you!) to submit their query letters and completed manuscripts... to take a chance on their dreams.

If your desire is to become a published writer, or a profitable one, don't be shy. Every time you think you have a story idea (or a reprint) that will make the perfect addition to a publication, submit it!

And don't fret over the no's. A "no" doesn't necessarily mean your writing is bad, it could simply be a case of bad timing. If you get a "no" from one publication, take your idea to another publication and try again. And keep submitting it, tweaking it along the way, until you get that coveted "yes".

The more you practice, the better you get, and the more assignments you will receive.

Worried you don't have what it takes to create a winning query letter?

Perhaps this little Q&A segment will help put your mind at ease.

When should I write a query letter?

- When the publication asks for one—some publications want completed manuscripts.
- When you've never written for the editor before.
- When you want to pitch a new idea, angle, or slant on an already covered issue.
- When you want to pitch a unique idea to an editor.

When should I give extensive details, possibly introducing the “potential” editor to my research material, in a query letter?

Depends on how comfortable you feel about giving away some of your sources; but never give away your key source. As a rule of thumb, you should always give something away—a nugget, a resource, a name. When the writing assignment pays a couple thousand dollars per piece, it can up your chances of being selected over the competition. It shows the editor you know how to research and find qualified sources. But never promise anything you cannot deliver.

Should I address the query letter to someone specific or keep it generic?

Check the masthead of the publication, or the website, for the person in charge of the department you want to write for and address it accordingly.

Should I tailor the query letter towards the publication I want to write for?

Yes! The more you let the editor know you understand his/her target audience and publication's needs, the more secure he/she will feel in giving you an assignment.

Should I have someone proof my query letter before sending it out?

If you belong to a critique group you trust, go for it. It doesn't hurt to let a second pair of eyes see your work before sending it out. However, I wouldn't worry about paying someone to proof your query letter. That is not only a waste of your hard-earned money, but a waste of time. Once you write your query letter, walk away from it and come back later, with a fresh pair of eyes, to proof and edit it.

When should I talk about myself?

Save the speech about why you are qualified for the closing.

Open your query letter with an attention grabbing paragraph. It could even be the opening paragraph to your actual article. Make the editor want to keep reading. Then add more enticing morsels in the paragraphs that follow. Leave the editor wanting to know more.

Should I mention that I've never been published before?

No. Let your skills do the speaking for you. Telling an editor you have never been published before and want to get published is like saying, “Please, please pick me!”

Should my query letter be one page, two pages, or more?

It depends on the material you're trying to cover. I believe a query letter can be one page if you can get your point across in that amount of time. If, however, your topic is a little controversial, politically incorrect, historical, etc. your query letter may need to be a few pages long to really sell the editor and/or publisher.

Should I include a self-addressed stamped envelope? I hear editors use their own stamps and envelopes anyway, and some don't even bother to respond.

It may seem like a waste of money to send a SASE when you have no guarantee the editor will use it to respond, but if you want to up your chances of getting some type of feedback, send that SASE.

Should I include samples of my writing?

If your samples are similar to the writing style of the publication, or match your query in some way, by all means send them. If however, you only have parenting publication writing samples and want to break into writing technical jargon, I wouldn't advise sending in samples of your work.

Should I mention how I would like to be paid, how much I would like to make, etc?

No. Never tell an editor what he/she has to pay you, especially when you are trying to gain his/her interest. Telling an editor how to respond to you, how to pay you, how he/she can edit your piece, etc. will get you the fastest rejection letter you ever received.

Editor's Pet Peeves

Contrary to popular belief, editors hate rejections as much as writers hate receiving them, but in order to produce high quality publications that keep both readers and advertisers happy, rejections are a necessary evil.

Editors must accept articles that are not only written with a high level of professionalism, but reflect the needs, wants, and desires of their targeted audience. And if that is not enough, each publication has its own voice and style. It's up to the writer submitting a query letter and/or final piece to meet that publication's standards, it's not up to the editor to twist and mangle a writer's piece to fit the publication's needs.

With that said, I've contacted some of my favorite online editors to help you understand what not only ticks an editor off, but can black-list you from ever writing for them again.

The Dabbling Mum

I am the editor of four newsletters and an online magazine for *BUSY* parents and nothing irritates me more than receiving an argument or insult from a writer because I rejected his or her piece—especially when asked for insight as to why the piece was rejected or how the writer could have improved on the piece and I take the time to reply.

Writers hate receiving form rejection letters because form letters do not tell them what was wrong with their piece, how it could be improved upon, or how it could be altered to fit the publication's needs. But having been insulted and bashed on numerous occasions for taking the time to respond to a writer's plea for insight, I can honestly say form letters are an editor's best friend. They not only save time, but they prevent a "he said, she said" battle of the wits with unprofessional writers.

Another pet peeve I have is when freelance writers do not take the time to draft a professional article because my publication pays on the low-end.

There have been times where I received a wonderful, smashing query letter and high-quality writing samples, only to be disappointed in the finished piece because the writer didn't put the same amount of effort into the piece he (or she) wrote for my publication.

If, as a freelance writer, you CHOOSE to write for smaller paying publications, you need to treat those publications with the same amount of respect and professionalism as you would if it were a publication paying a dollar a word. You just never know when that editor will move on to work for a higher-paying publication and take you along for the ride. Besides, a steady flow of easy-to-write lower paying articles can be great for your pocket-book.

Alyce Edrich
Editor, The Dabbling Mum eMagazine
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Funds for Writers

As editor of [FundsforWriters](http://fundsforwriters.com) I review submissions for any one of our four newsletters. Sometimes writers hit the mark when querying ideas and at other times they miss, but we are usually cordial in our exchanges about what was missing, lacking, still needed.

As a writer, I like giving feedback because I love getting it. Most appreciate the response, and almost all respect me for giving prompt responses, usually within a week of receipt if not a day.

Very few writers cross the line venturing into the realm of editor irritation, and for that I am extremely grateful. But those very few who do cross over do so with some permanent damage. I have two main pet peeves:

1. Writers who reply to my rejection with an argument why their article fit my publication, and
2. Writers who email me within a week's receipt wanting to know if I've made a decision.

Repeatedly sending submissions to an editor after rejection is honorable and demonstrates tenacity, but repeatedly sending the SAME submission is suicide. It becomes a test of wills as to who will break down first. And writers need to know that editors can last a long time in that battle of wits. No means no regardless of how sweet or how harsh she delivers it to you. Sending an article with corrections when the editor has declined the piece is almost as bad as telling the editor that the piece DOES fit the publication, regardless of the rejection.

But if a writer wants to irritate an editor, try telling her that you are headed out of town and would like the decision before you leave. Now that's the number one irritation I've ever had as an editor. She got the answer, and it was a good article which I purchased. But she has received little attention from me since.

Manners go a long way in this business. If you have to wonder if it's right to do something, do not do it. One day you might need that editor for more work, higher paying assignments, or even a recommendation. Remember that the editor was or is a writer as well. An editor doesn't just put on the editor's hat and forget all she learned as a writer. She can wear both hats quite well. And telling her the hats don't fit is like spitting in the wind. You'll pay a price.

C. Hope Clark
Editor, FundsforWriters
<http://fundsforwriters.com>

Four year winner of the Writer's Digest 101 Best Websites for Writers.
Author, THE SHY WRITER, An Introvert's Guide to Writing Success,

Write From Home

As the editor of [Write From Home](http://writefromhome.com), an award-winning publication for writers, I have to say my biggest pet peeve is writers who query or submit a completed manuscript without familiarizing themselves with my publication and the writers' guidelines.

For example, the writers' guidelines specify the maximum length we accept for articles is 1,000 words. Yet, I constantly receive queries inquiring if I'd be interested in 3,000 word articles. Naturally, I reject these queries and submissions, no matter how much they appeal to me. Website readers have short attention spans. The odds are against them taking the time to read a 3,000 word article.

Also, Write From Home is a website for writers with a focus on the craft of writing. It is not a mainstream parenting publication. Yet, writers often query me, or worse, submit a completed manuscript slanted entirely on some aspect of parenting—leading to a rejection. Had the writer studied the website, he or she would've realized I do not publish mainstream parenting material.

When writers send non-targeted queries and submissions they waste the editor's time as well as their own time. Not studying a publication and its guidelines can be the difference between an acceptance or a rejection. I'm in awe at the number of writers that avoid this fundamental step in pursuit of finding a home for their articles.

My advice: Give yourself a competitive edge by reviewing the publication, its target audience, and its guidelines before querying or submitting a completed manuscript. A well-researched query or submission sent to a targeted market will produce much higher results. And often result in more acceptances and less rejections.

Kim Wilson,
Editor, Write From Home
<http://writefromhome.com>

Writer's Apprentice

As the editor and publisher of a trade publication for aspiring, beginning, and intermediate writers called Writer's Apprentice magazine, I get many submissions daily. Unfortunately 90 percent of them aren't right for our publication.

As I dig my way through the "slush pile," as the huge pile of submissions is called, I find numerous recurrences of the same errors over and over. Frankly, it gets tiresome—and these same mistakes continually doom a writer's query letter or submission to the rejection pile time and time again.

I always have to wonder what writers are thinking when they submit their work. Don't they want to sell their articles? Do they pay any attention to standard industry practices? Do they proofread their work before they submit it?

By sharing my top 10 pet peeves with you, I hope you can learn what not to do and increase your chances of getting your work accepted and published.

1. ***Incorrect punctuation!*** For example, over and over I see writers using single quotation marks when they should use double quotation marks, such as when a person is speaking. I also see writers using two punctuation marks together incorrectly, such as ending a sentence with both an exclamation point and a question mark. If you have trouble in this area, brush up on your punctuation rules, get a good book like the Gregg Reference Manual, or take an English refresher class. These kinds of errors brand you an amateur.
2. ***Incorrect word usage.*** For example, using the word lightening when you mean thunder and lightning or accept when the correct word is except or affect instead of effect. I could list a couple of dozen incorrectly used words that commonly confuse writers and irritate editors to no end. If in doubt, look the words up to ensure (not insure) you are using the correct word!
3. ***Words that are capitalized for no apparent reason.*** I saw a manuscript recently where the words hide 'n seek were capitalized. Why, I ask you? The answer: who knows what the writer was thinking! Only capitalize words when there is a valid reason for doing so, such as capitalizing the name of a city, state, or proper name. Don't capitalize words randomly.
4. ***Writers who automatically assume their work will be published.*** I had one writer who ended his submission cover letter with something along the lines of, "Please tell me when you will publish this article and how much you will pay for it." Pretty presumptuous, don't you think—especially given the fact that the article was nothing short of atrocious! Needless to say, the piece didn't get published.
5. ***Writers who repeatedly write or call to ask if I received their submission.*** It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that if I keep getting interrupted to check to see if a writer's submission a) was received, b) has been reviewed, c) is being accepted – that it doesn't leave me with much time to actually review the submissions, accept the ones I want, edit the ones I've accepted, and publish the actual magazine. Writers seldom have any idea just how hectic an editor's day can be, and frequent interruptions only slow me down!
6. ***Writers who send me emails asking for the writer's guidelines when they are right there in plain view on the website.*** Go to the website to look for current writer's guidelines before contacting an editor and interrupting him or her with a request for something already easily available to you. (If you have email, you obviously have Internet access and can access and download the guidelines yourself.)

7. ***Flimsy, fluff-type submissions that don't have any real meat.*** Do you have any idea how many essays and articles I receive from unknown, unpublished writers who want to write a how-to piece on getting published (when they haven't yet been published, so how would they know?) or pieces that basically say, "I've always dreamed of being a writer and now I write" which has no take-away value for the reader? If you're going to write an article, make sure you have something specific and valuable to say. Your piece should have a purpose—whether that purpose is to entertain, educate, inform, or inspire.
8. ***Writers who ask for a complete critique of their work, free advice, or to tell them how to fix their work.*** Magazine editors simply do not have time to provide critiques of each article they receive and read. In particular, if the piece needs a lot of work, the time involved in teaching someone to write is extensive. If you are still learning to write, take a writing class, join a writer's critique group, or hire an individual editor or mentor, but don't ask a magazine editor to teach you how to write. It's not their job, and they simply don't have the time.
9. ***Writers who have obviously never read the publication or the publication's guidelines.*** Writer's Apprentice is a trade publication for writers. We teach writers about writing and getting published. We don't publish science fiction stories or children's stories or books. Read the guidelines and know something about the publication you're submitting to. Don't assume anything based on the title or a short blurb on potential markets lists. Do your homework and gear your submission to the specific publication you're pitching.

And my number one pet peeve...

10. ***Writers who argue with the editor's decision not to publish their work or berate the editor for not having the foresight to publish their masterpiece.*** Needless to say, editors talk to one another, so this kind of unprofessional, bordering-on-psychotic behavior simply gets you put at the top of a "never work with this nut" type of list. No editor will readily admit they keep this kind of list, but rest assured that anyone who has ever received some of the responses to rejection letters that I have has such a list tucked safely away somewhere! If you want to get published, act like a professional, don't tell the editor how stupid he or she is, and don't argue with his or her decision.

As I re-read this list, I started to worry that readers would think my top 10 pet peeves list sounded a bit bitchy. Then I asked another editor's opinion and she basically said, "But it's all true."

The fact is, my top 10 pet peeves are shared by many editors—along with a few more specific ones of their own—and most editors are just too PC (politically correct) to come right straight out and enumerate them for fear of offending someone. But I know for a fact numerous editors are cheering me right now for being forthright and honest as they read this!

At the risk of offending any of you who've done any of the above, I want to assure you that I only have your best interest at heart. Editors are a harried, over-stressed bunch, but we're not mean! We want to see good writers get published! But there is a protocol to follow, and you've got to present yourself like a professional.

From here on out, avoid my top 10 pet peeves and you'll increase your chances of getting published, paid, and on the top of the editor's "preferred writers" list!

I wish you all the best and great publishing success!

Tina L. Miller,
Editor, *Writer's Apprentice Magazine*

Leslie Friesen

Please pay attention to the extra care this author went into explaining the details of her assignment and the pay that resulted.

The Query Letter

I plunged into freelance writing in November of 2003. By January, I (foolishly) believed I had mastered the art of querying and fired the following email off to Steve Towns, editor of Government Technology Magazine.

Subject: Small Government Website Responsibilities

Good Morning, Mr. Towns,

I am the webmaster for several local governments in Oregon and am interested in writing an article discussing the need to balance financial resources with the need for local government websites. Is it a beneficial use of taxpayer money to provide a forum for citizens to chat with their local mayor? Does a county have the obligation to provide sections which are in essence free advertising for local businesses, restaurants, etc.? Or should taxpayer money be utilized only for solid business functions which allow the government to run cheaper, faster, and quicker?

The completed article will be no more than 1000 words in length and can be delivered to you in hard copy and/or via email within two weeks of your acceptance.

My writing credits include a local newspaper column, technical documents for software packages, several monthly newsletters (both writing and editing other's work), and copy for numerous websites.

My email address is: friesenleslie@qwest.net

Sincerely,

Leslie Friesen
(private address included here)

Mr. Towns responded immediately with interest in the article and requested up to 1200 words. I was thrilled!

This is where the tricky stuff began. You see, when I originally proposed the idea, I had already developed a preconceived opinion on this question. Unfortunately, as I began researching the issue, the bulk of the research revealed that my own opinion was flat wrong. It didn't take long before I realized that I had promised to write an article for a major publication and was in way over my head. The research did not back up my hypothesis. A growing sense of panic began gnawing at my gut.

That same gut also urged me to quit the assignment, chalk it up to experience and run the other way without looking back. I even consulted with a well-known expert in freelance writing at a writer's conference. She thoughtfully agreed that writing a humble resignation letter to Mr. Towns was the best course if I truly couldn't finish the article. I have to admit that I was relieved. I was off the hook!

One of the best things I did as a new freelance author was joining an online critique group. Many fantastic groups exist that are more than willing to rip, err, critique, your work in exchange for you doing the same for their work. I drafted a humble resignation letter explaining my dilemma and sent it off to my co-horts.

Instead of being supportive, as I expected based on the author's opinion at the conference that day, my peers ripped me! They felt – and were correct – that quitting was extremely unprofessional behavior and that I needed to get my act together. Resigning would force my editor into the bad spot of scrambling to find a replacement piece and would assure that I would never write for that magazine again. The group pointed out that a professional would do the research and write the article based on the research results. It must be an objective process, and not merely a means to back up my own opinion.

Their comments hurt, but were well intended and in the end taught me one of the most valuable lessons I learned during that first year. I requested additional time from my editor and then I hit the internet, running. Instead of pounding the pavement, I pounded the keyboard. I squeezed 35 email interviews and surveys of local government IT professionals across the country into the next ten days and wrote the article as promised. Mr. Towns loved the article and accepted it within an hour of receiving the piece.

Again, I was thrilled. But there was one problem. No one made mention of a contract or financial compensation for the article. As a new writer, I was not quite sure how to handle this new development. I finally raised my nerve and emailed the editor's assistant. She replied that Government Technology does not usually pay its authors for articles such as mine. I was devastated. This article required a tremendous amount of sweat equity and raised my stress levels to soaring heights, and I wasn't even going to get paid for it? Another lesson learned.

In the end, Government Technology was extremely gracious and, considering the circumstances, offered a contract for a whopping \$500 for the article. At that point in my career, \$500 was the most I had ever earned for a writing assignment. Even more valuable than that check, however, were the lessons that I learned:

1. Do preliminary research before you query an editor;
2. Research your target publication prior to querying;
3. Clearly discuss payment policies before submitting the final article, and
4. Never give up!

Leslie Friesen is a freelance writer.

The Published Sample

Weighing the Financial Responsibilities of EGovernment: (1381)

By Leslie Friesen

According to the National Association of Counties, only 61% of counties published a website during the year 2000. Existing sites typically offered little more than an online brochure introducing departments and contact information. Merely 8% offered transaction processing in addition to information dissemination. In four short years, the bar raised dramatically. Hobnobbing with an Orwellian view of the future, today's eGovernment crosses into the realm of interactive business partner and virtual friend.

Citizens now debate directly with elected officials in chat rooms rather than simply confirming their names and contact information on the web. Instead of learning where to obtain a business license, the public now applies, pays for, receives and prints a current license all from the privacy and convenience of their own home. In short, we no longer merely read information. We actually DO.

The phenomenal explosion of interactive business applications and web offering by government sites raises interesting questions. For instance, is it a wise use of taxpayer money to offer a service simply because it's cool and we've learned how to do it? Of course not.

A hard-core techie myself, I understand the lure of new tools and toys. Some women get excited about a new pair of Manolo Blahniks. I feel giddy over new releases of Macromedia's Fireworks. I am a techno-geek and proud of it. I am also a single mother who hands over an astronomical portion of her monthly salary for taxes. If I don't get to spend that money myself, I want my government to make every effort to be prudent in its spending choices.

Goal of EGovernment

According to Oakland County, MI, the goal of eGovernment is to "facilitate the delivery of services and information that Oakland County provides to its citizens, businesses, employees and other governments." Waiting in line services morphed into online services. Polk County, Oregon's IT Director, Dean Anderson, sums it up nicely. "The purpose of eGovernment is to provide services and business applications in a way that helps the county to run better, cheaper and faster."

Quantifying the Goals

It is difficult to quantify these goals. In 2003, Oakland County's eGovernment group conducted a rare cost/benefit analysis focused on providing a website presence with interactive applications. Statistics revealed that 1,204,767 documents were downloaded from their website during 2003. When applying the cost incurred by a Clerk I position (\$14.28 per hour) taking a phone call and subsequently mailing the document to the requestor, the County saved an estimated \$2,373,391 annually by providing those services online.

Time is money and each document downloaded represents one less trip into the courthouse and one less customer to assist in person. Benefits abound on both sides of the counter.

The study does not; however, appear to factor in the cost of developing and maintaining this website. Applications don't write themselves and servers aren't built without the assistance of a techno-geek that expects to get paid for his or her efforts. When gauging the success of eGovernment, the cost incurred to actually develop these sites must not be overlooked.

Quantifying intangibles such as the element of convenience challenges hard-number crunching, as well. Can we assign a dollar amount to customer warm-fuzzy satisfaction? Customer satisfaction and convenience merit recognition, but how do we merge that abstract value into a cost/benefit study? Doug Finnman, the Internet and Document Information Systems Manager for the City of Fort Collins, CO, uses the "Value on Investment" (VOI) approach. Acknowledging that it is difficult to measure the benefits of a website through increased sales or revenues (as the private sector does), Ft. Collins believes they are realizing a strong VOI based on measures such as:

- "Overall use of the site, citizen self-service/convenient access to e-services;
- citizen interaction;
- quality, timeliness, and accuracy of services; and
- increased productivity and resource savings."

Evaluating the Data

Both Oakland County and the City of Fort Collins deserve recognition for taking efforts to perform some type of cost/benefit analysis on their websites. The vast majority of local governments rely solely upon public feedback and web log analysis to make this determination.

Sight of the overall picture occasionally fogs over in our eagerness to embrace the advantages of eGovernment. Evaluating the data can easily become a subjective process. Case in point: OpenDemocracy.net recently published an article by Keith Culver which examines an experiment by Saint John, New Brunswick, to conduct a public consultation on the tough financial choices looming in their budget process. The city expended significant effort and resources soliciting public participation. 218 people participated online and officials agreed that the electronic consultation was worth repeating.

The population of Saint John is approximately 75,000 people. The participation of 218 citizens translates to only .29% of the population. Meeting the needs of less than one percent of the population hardly qualifies as a 'success.' Good intentions, certainly, but not good numbers.

Determining Which Services to Offer

Today, states, counties and cities across the country engage in experimental applications and services. Some of these will be useful and others will not.

Care must be taken to evaluate both the fiscal savings and the human factor in these experiments.

Ft. Collins discovered that considerable development time and resources were wasted when an average of only 5 people joined in virtual chat rooms with their officials.

The City of Bend, Oregon learned the hard way that forums could easily violate open meeting laws, according to Patricia Stall, City Recorder. “The ease in which the internet works makes it very easy to slip into a rolling meeting. This occurred in our town and the result was much embarrassment. To correct the matter, we held a meeting in public so the matter would be discussed publicly.” Ouch.

Steve Johnson, webmaster for Cayuga County, NY, cautions agencies considering the use of a forum type of two-way communication. Public forums allow anyone to read the comments posted, whether or not the information contained is accurate or official. A disastrous can of worms waiting to be nudged open.

Online directories for local business, restaurants, churches and other organizations warrant careful consideration, as well. This information is certainly valuable to the public, but government cannot even appear to provide an unfair advantage to those businesses listed on its site. The role of government in the business community is to “create a positive economic climate in which businesses may grow and prosper; it is not in the business to promote any specific private sector activity, whether it’s business, non-profit, educational or individual,” says Phil Bertolini, the IT Director of Oakland County.

A strong argument exists that promoting business and tourism is, indeed, a valid use of taxpayer money because it indirectly benefits the taxpayer by strengthening the local economy. Most government sites offer links to the local Chamber of Commerce to assist this sector, while many others, such as Cayuga County, NY, sponsor extensive web portals on a secondary site (CayugaNet.org.)

Determining the Future

Bertolini notes that our entire government process is based upon citizens having the freedom to provide input and discuss issues relevant to them. At one point, all interaction between the individual citizen and government was done in person or by mail. Telephones and fax machines added new options. The precedent was already established long before the digital age arrived. The explosion of interactive services and applications will continue to flourish. Today’s governments must be forward thinking, especially with a ratio of 9 in 10 school age children having access to a computer (source: Bertolini cites the Commerce Department’s Census Bureau.) Kids surf the internet more than they talk on the telephone and will demand that eGovernment only expand in the years to come.

Local leaders must carefully consider the fiscal responsibility associated with eGovernment, in addition to the VOI factor. Resources are best spent on solid business services and applications that not only make public interaction quicker and easier, but which also can be shown to save taxpayer money. Cost benefit analysis and accountability must become the norm rather than the exception.

Personally, I look forward to the day when I can attend a virtual commission meeting from the beaches of Tahiti on a long-awaited vacation. I'll be the one wearing Manolo Blahniks, designing graphics on a laptop and sipping a mai tai as I 'listen' in.

Leslie Friesen is a freelance writer, single mother and professional web designer. She is also a columnist for her local paper and currently working on an inspirational book, entitled, "A to Z: Play With Me." Visit her at Scarlett Design <http://www.scarlettdz9.com>

Phyllis Edgerly Ring

The Query Letter #1

Oct. 10, 2003

First & Last Name, Executive Editor
Family Business
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. Editor's Last Name,

Might you have interest in an article of about 1,500 words that addresses how challenges shared by couples who work together illustrate what makes for a good "working relationship" in every marriage?

The article is based on interviews with three couples who share their home and work life and includes input from marriage therapists, explores:

- How they work out the roles and rules at work and at home, especially when one is the other's boss;
- How they balance work and family life, and find time together;
- How they share the fruits of their labors with each other and their family;
- The "working assets" (material and spiritual) that their life-style provides for their children; and
- Why it works for them.

The article can also be accompanied by a 300-word tips sidebar, "Tools for Relationships That Work," which addresses how to make nurturing a relationship a priority, time together and saying no to technology, how to share tasks, solve problems, communicate clearly and supportively, being knowledgeable about each other's strengths and weaknesses, and, above all, fostering love and avoiding the damaging effects of criticism.

As a freelancer and mother of two who has been married for 24 years, I have, at times, shared the workplace with my husband. My writing has appeared in American Profile, Business NH, Christian Science Monitor, Hope, Ms., and Yankee magazines. (Published writing samples are included at my web-site address below.) I very much appreciate your consideration of this query, and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Edgerly Ring
(Address)
<http://www.phyllisring.com>

The Published Sample #1

For Better, For Worse (Feature Story)

Marriages That Work

Both marriage and business ownership require commitment and perseverance. Three entrepreneurial couples share their strategies for coping with the pressures.

By Phyllis Edgerly Ring

When Ron and Denise Provenzano first went into business for themselves in 1985, they seemed to be living an entrepreneur's dream. Denise, who had worked in the beauty industry for 13 years, left her hair stylist job to oversee staff development and training at the couple's first Zano Salon and Day Spa, based in the Chicago area. Ron, who had been corporate manager of a \$30 million food store chain, concentrated on the salon's operational and strategic issues.

But three years later, a miscalculation -- opening a second location in Wheaton, Ill., before the business could sustain an expansion -- nearly cost them their fledgling company. The Provenzanos admit that the decision, which Ron calls "somewhat seat-of-the-pants," was too hasty. "We went forward undercapitalized and nearly lost the business, a huge lesson for us," says Ron, now 58.

Zano Salons and Day Spas today is a \$9 million business with four locations and 170 employees. But when costs began to mount after the second salon opened, it looked like curtains for the company. The problems began four months after the Wheaton opening. "Some expenses came up, including a big repair that essentially drained our cash," Ron says. "We didn't have enough to make payroll that week." He had to borrow money from his previous job's profit-sharing account to make up the difference.

Denise, now 51, recalls that "I had some choice words for Ron, at first, and questions like, 'How could you let this happen?' But I knew his intentions were good, even if some decisions hadn't been. It does no good to blame one another if you're a partnership." Despite the setback, Denise says, she knew Ron's focus on the future was good for the business. "Ron's a visionary," she says proudly. Today, the Wheaton salon is doing well, Ron and Denise report.

Entrepreneurial couples like the Provenzanos face challenges large and small every day, notes Joyce Brockhaus, a family business consultant based in St. Louis. Mistakes come with the territory and often lead to disagreements, Brockhaus notes. Successful "co-preneurs" look upon these situations as opportunities, she says. "If the individuals involved can better understand the underlying issues and needs, both their own and those of the other," Brockhaus says, "there's a much greater probability of defusing the intensity of the conflict and achieving a positive outcome."

By 1991, the Provenzanos' business had fully recovered from the earlier fiscal setback. But Ron's idea to open a third salon, in Batavia, Ill., prompted some pointed questions from a skeptical Denise. "I was concerned less about the idea than about the location," she recalls.

"We were established in more urban settings, and Batavia was 25 miles out -- with cornfields and tractors. As the systems person, I was asking, 'How will we make this work? How will I ever staff things to our requirements way out here?' Ron was looking five years out to the future and saw that this was going to be a boomtown. He went into sales mode, hounding me day and night to convince me that this really was a good idea, money was there to do it and the time was right."

The gamble paid off. The Batavia salon is now their highest-grossing facility. "It took a lot of work to make it happen," says Denise, "including some active recruiting, since there wasn't a lot of technical talent in that location, and more involved training. We offered incentives packages above what we usually did, to make it worth the drive, and actively involved employees in decisions so they wouldn't feel like they were at some forgotten outpost."

Both marriage and entrepreneurship require commitment and perseverance, and combining them demands honesty and creativity, successful business couples report. Denise Provenzano says she and Ron are able to work through disagreements because of the respect they have for each other, as well as the "shared values that keep you trusting that you're heading toward the same goal."

Kim and Scott Holstein, co-founders of Kim & Scott's Gourmet Pretzels, a multimillion-dollar Chicago company, recently reached an impasse over a scheduled appearance on the QVC television sales network. Scott, 37, felt that only one of them should travel to the station, based outside of Philadelphia, to appear on the broadcast. Kim, 36, thought both of them should go. After debating the issue for several hours, the couple went out to dinner and tried out a conflict-resolution strategy one of their mentors had suggested: One partner listens to the other person's perspective without interruption, and then repeats back what was heard.

The tactic helped them communicate as both marriage and business partners, Kim recalls. "I learned that Scott was feeling overwhelmed with sales and other responsibilities," she says. "He heard that I wanted both of us to go because business trips provide us with time together, and because of how powerful I believe we are together in the on-air appearances."

"The business, like the name, is 'Kim and Scott,'" notes Scott. "That's a big part of how we present the product. It's great when something like QVC helps us get away together, and it's kind of sad when we don't both get to go because owning a company, it's often hard to get away together. Of course, as the business grows, we do have to 'divide and conquer' more and handle things individually."

Ultimately, they did the QVC gig together and, coincidentally, the show aired on the anniversary of their first sell-out appearance. "We sold out again -- double the product we'd sold a year before," Kim says.

The Holsteins managed their disagreement well, consultant Brockhaus says. They gave their discussion uninterrupted privacy and an environment conducive to effective communication, she notes. The couple entered the discussion determined to gather facts and to clarify why they disagreed. In addition, Brockhaus points out, they worked to make the process mutually respectful and listened without interruption in order to really hear and understand each other's view. "This provides an opportunity to check assumptions and verify the intentions behind the other's 'offending' behavior," Brockhaus says.

In Lexington, S.C., Bryan and Celeste Springer, who met as dental-school classmates, are now partners in a cosmetic dentistry practice that grosses more than \$1 million annually. Celeste, now 40, was the practice's sole owner for two years before Bryan, 42, closed his own practice and joined hers 12 years ago.

They navigated a few landmines when they started out because they hadn't delineated duties, they admit. Both were accustomed to working with their own assistants, Celeste says, and confusion arose around how to share staff like hygienists and business assistants, whom they refer to as "team members." The couple came to rely on having "intelligent team members that can think through situations and choose the right way to handle them," she says. They strove to create an atmosphere in which employees can be very candid, if necessary.

"We were affectionately referred to as 'the two-headed beast' at first," says Bryan, "but the team quickly realized which 'parent' to go to for personal requests. We, in turn, answered every request with, 'If Celeste (or Bryan) agrees, and then it will be OK.'" Now that the couple have defined their roles more clearly, their response is more likely to be, "I don't handle that area, so go directly to the source," he says.

Before finalizing their business plan, the Springers took a course that helped them develop short- and long-term goals. Celeste says that the couple's different strengths determined how they divided their responsibilities. "Bryan is naturally better at numbers than I am," Celeste notes, "so he handles the checkbook and accounts. Since he's dealing on a more intimate level with the accountant, his name appears as president on our paperwork. I have a knack for understanding and communicating with people. I'm also very efficient and organized, so that led to my handling the office systems and overseeing the team. We still help with each area, but each of us is accountable for our area."

The couple sometimes must work to resolve disagreements that arise when Bryan overrules Celeste's requests for new equipment.

"She is a very emotional buyer, which is a salesperson's dream," says Bryan. "I have a more analytical approach. These personality differences are a great balance but can lead to stressful discussions."

“Bryan will tell you that I spend without discretion,” says Celeste. “When he tells me not to use the credit card and I do anyway, he bickers and I tune him out. That may not be healthy, but that’s what really happens. He claims he’ll die early from a heart attack. But my side is that he spends as much as I do but won’t admit it.”

Sometimes, Celeste says, resolution of an issue involves trial runs to test new ideas. For example, she would like to shift their work schedule to more flexible hours. Bryan hasn’t been as eager to make this change, but Celeste says they’ve agreed to try it together and assess how well it works.

Business couples who disagree with each other must be careful about how they discuss the issue in front of employees, clients and other key “outsiders.” Consultant Brockhaus recommends developing a written code of conduct that outlines a professional way of managing business conflicts.

Salon owner Denise Provenzano says she and husband Ron always try to show a unified front in discussions with employees. “You never want employees to feel that they have to choose sides,” says Denise. “It’s like going onstage. You may have to act a bit. But by acting it, you become it.”

“Just as in parenthood, a couple has to be present for employees who need them, no matter what’s going on between them personally,” Ron says. “You have to help each other do that, even when it’s hard.”

When business couples disagree, their shared vision for the company must take precedence over individual feelings, Brockhaus advises. “The business is not an extension of their marriage,” she cautions. “Their roles in the business must be professional.” Couples should develop a shared vision when they start their company and re-examine this vision as the business grows, Brockhaus notes.

The Holsteins launched Kim & Scott’s Gourmet Pretzels in 1995 with \$25,000 borrowed from family members and charged to credit cards. Developing a business model was as much of a challenge for them as financing the new venture. Kim, who had a marketing background, wanted the company to have a public face, so she advocated opening a retail store. Scott, on the other hand, thought their best opportunities were in food service. He’d managed his family’s Ben & Jerry’s franchise in Chicago, so he already had experience in the industry. Ultimately, the Holsteins decided to go the food service route because of Scott’s sales background in this area and because they lacked the funds to open a store. Their business, which now employs 90 people, plans to open its first retail store this year.

Kim and Scott engaged a consultant to help them define their roles in their new company. They chose a co-presidency -- a decision Kim says stemmed from their willingness to take responsibility for their weaknesses as well as their strengths, “which frees us up to find the right people to help us.”

Consultant Brockhaus recommends scenario planning for entrepreneurial couples: What will they do if the business grows far beyond its present size or, conversely, experiences a severe downturn? How will they cope if an illness leaves one of them unable to work -- or if one partner simply wants to leave the business to do something else? And -- difficult though this may be to discuss -- how will they protect the company, and each partner's personal income, in the event of a divorce?

The Holsteins thus far have focused more on nurturing growth than on addressing future contingencies, Kim admits. Their accountant and attorney, who have helped other business couples work through these issues, have advised the Holsteins of their importance, she adds. Couples need knowledgeable third parties to guide them through discussions like this, which they otherwise might never get to on their own, Kim says. She and Scott each attend individual support groups.

Salon owner Ron Provenzano says he prefers to accentuate the positive. "You obviously prefer to focus on staying power, in both the business and the marriage, rather than on 'what if's," he says. "Most of us succeed because we've simply decided that failure is not an option."

Says Ron, who's been married to Denise for 32 years: "Having worked through so many things together in both the marriage and the business, we just naturally feel a deeper commitment to stick by everything we've created together."

Dentists Celeste and Bryan Springer hope to add an associate and sell a third of the dental practice "when the numbers are right," Celeste says. She notes that they plan to amass a portion of their retirement funds by selling pieces of the business "until we sell ourselves out of it." If either of them wanted to leave before that time, she adds, the departing partner would have to buy the other out. They have worked with a financial planner who specializes in helping dentists develop these kinds of agreements, she notes.

Many entrepreneurial couples find it hard to avoid talking business, even during "family time." It's often challenging to achieve balance in home and work life. The Springers, whose two sons are ages eight and three, take piano lessons as a family and try to have at least three family dinners each week, preferably at home. They also schedule a "date night" each week. They plan time apart, as well: On their different days off, they usually do their own thing and then meet up for lunch.

Ron Provenzano says he and Denise "live by our calendars." Over the years, he says, they have learned that if they want time together, they must plan it in advance. "If one needs to schedule something for work or ourselves," Denise says, "we try to do it when the other already has something scheduled."

In the Holstein household, Kim manages day-to-day duties at home while Scott takes care of operational matters at the office. The Holsteins, who have two young daughters, say they've made a rule that helps maintain boundaries between home and work: No business talk in their bedroom. "Sometimes, one of us will bring up a work issue, and we'll literally walk out of the bedroom to respect this boundary," says Kim.

Kim says owning a business means finding new learning experiences every day. “It’s important to try to stay fun and flexible,” she says, “and to accept that we’re going to make mistakes. We’re getting better at learning not to take things too hard, celebrate the successes, learn from the mistakes and enjoy where we are today.”

This kind of attitude sustains marriages, too, consultant Joyce Brockhaus notes. “Couples who are able to work well together as business partners and have a loving, supportive marriage are some of the luckiest people in the world,” she says. FB

CALLOUTS:

At Bryan and Celeste Springer’s dental practice, employees affectionately referred to them as ‘the two-headed beast.’

Pretzel entrepreneurs Kim and Scott Holstein have made a rule: No business talk in the bedroom.

‘You never want employees to feel that they have to choose sides,’ says salon co-owner Denise Provenzano.

Phyllis Edgerly Ring has published more than 900 articles, essays, and short stories in magazines that include *Baby Years*, *Christian Parenting Today*, *Delicious Living*, *Ms.*, and *Yankee*. A columnist for several publications, she also serves as instructor for the Long Ridge Writers Group of the Institute of Children's Literature. Her children's story, "The Bat is Back," will be published by Brilliant. She writes from her home in Exeter, NH. <http://www.phyllisring.com>

The Query Letter #2

Oct. 20, 2000

National Editor
American Profile
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Ms. Editor's Last Name,

Valerie Cunningham helped New Hampshire save a legacy it nearly lost, and created a model for preserving African-American history along the way.

New Hampshire prides itself on how well it preserves history, and Valerie's hometown of Portsmouth boasts National Register properties that showcase four centuries of it. Most people assume, however, that few African Americans were found on these historic streets until well into the 20th century. The 59-year-old researcher not only uncovered evidence that black people lived in Portsmouth as early as 1645, but successfully debunked the myth that freedom-loving New Hampshire was largely free of slavery.

A recipient of New Hampshire's Martin Luther King Jr. Award and, more recently, of a University of New Hampshire President's Award of Excellence, she has recently seen her 30-year search for the presence of her people establish the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail.

This self-guided tour of more than 40 sites brings three centuries of African-American history to schools and cultural centers throughout the region, and to the thousands of visitors that choose Portsmouth as a vacation destination each year.

The Trail incorporates many of the sites Portsmouth has successfully preserved while defining a sense of place for a whole "invisible" population. Among its sites: The home of the black Revolutionary War soldier who crossed the Delaware with General George Washington; the refuge provided by a free woman of color for one of Washington's escaped servants; and the home of Rosary Cooper, America's first woman crane operator. The Trail includes the mansions of Portsmouth's earliest families and the resting place of those so poor that only asphalt marks the spot today.

Thanks to Cunningham's good work, the Trail's sites come alive with history's essence – stories – ones that encompass the lives of both races and illustrate their relationships. The Trail is also prompting Portsmouth citizens to take preservation action before it's too late, including the recent resurrection of "The Pearl," one of the city's first black churches, and site of a "Safe House" on the Underground Railroad.

Would you be willing to take a look at "The Place Her People Made: On the Trail of Black History", a piece of about 1,500 words that profiles Valerie Cunningham's work and the emergence of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail?

As a freelancer, I've published more than 700 articles in magazines and newspapers, including Yankee, Arizona Parenting, Hope, Northeast Outdoors, Quilt World, New Hampshire Home and Pockets magazine for children. I can supply both color and black-and-white artwork (including a print of a vintage photo or two) to accompany the article. I very much appreciate your consideration of this query, and look forward to your reply. Sincerely,

Phyllis Edgerly Ring
Street Address
<http://www.phyllisring.com>

The Published Sample #2

On The Trail of Black History (Feature Story)

By Phyllis Edgerly Ring

Valerie Cunningham's 30-year labor of love preserved a legacy New Hampshire had nearly lost.

The state prides itself on its preservation of history; indeed, Portsmouth, her hometown, boasts properties that showcase four centuries of it. Most residents assumed that few African Americans walked these historic streets until well into the 20th century.

But Cunningham discovered that black people not only lived in Portsmouth as early as 1645 but have contributed significantly to it ever since. She also learned that New Hampshire, whose state motto is "Live Free or Die," was not free of slavery.

Cunningham's 30 years of research culminated last June in the opening of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, a self-guided tour of more than 40 sites revealing three centuries of African American history to residents, schoolchildren, and the thousands of tourists who visit Portsmouth each year.

Cunningham seems a little stunned by this development, which some have called a "model of preservation of black history for American communities," and she tries to share credit with anyone who lent support along the way, but her years of work literally blazed this trail.

"When I think back to when I was almost afraid to ask questions, when people reacted so weirdly, it's like a miracle to see it come to this," says Cunningham, 59. "When I attempted to find out about the Africans and black Americans who had lived in my hometown and in New Hampshire before me, there was nobody and nothing available to tell that history. It was as if generations of black people had never lived," she says.

Walking the trail

Most of the 40 sites on the Black Heritage Trail are located within the same square mile or so of downtown Portsmouth, though a few are on the city's periphery. Most can be visited within an hour.

Organizers divided the trail into smaller segments called "Topical Trails" with several themes: Work, Resistance and Civil Rights, Black Women, Religion, Institutions, Enslavement and Emancipation, and Patriotic Service.

Trail sites not only tell stories of black history but are woven into the lives of well-known Americans. One is the home of Prince Whipple, the black Revolutionary War soldier pictured in the famous painting of Gen. George Washington crossing the Delaware. This soldier's daughter, Ester Mulleneaux, later would help establish one of the earliest schools for black children.

Nearby is an election hall where annual celebrations were held, beginning in 1881, commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation. Trail sites also recount recent stories such as that of African American Rosary B. Cooper who, when World War II produced a labor shortage at home, became one of the nation's first women crane operators at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

"The efforts of those who have organized the trail are literally changing the face of New Hampshire history," says Jeffrey Bolster, a University of New Hampshire history professor and author of *Black Jacks: African-American Seamen in the Age of Sail*.

The trail is also a tangible link to the past. "History lives all around us, but too often we are unaware of the full story of our own past. This essential resource can teach us to see," says John Ernest, who directs the university's department of African American Studies and who, like Bolster, consulted on the trail project.

Searching the records

Valerie Cunningham's quest began in Portsmouth's early church records. "Churches had insisted that everyone be baptized, so records were fairly complete," she says. They indicated a slave's first name, and the name of the white owner.

"At the time, I didn't know what I was doing—just trying to find out whether black people had lived in Portsmouth, filling up notebooks with names and dates, proving that yes, they had been here," she recalls.

Their presence raised more questions: How did they get there? Where did they go? She combed through county probate records of slaves passing from master to widow or children; newspaper advertisements offering rewards for runaways; or the sale of slaves, including those brought in by ship and sold at the dock in Portsmouth.

"I began to connect some of the names and realize that there were families—generations—to be identified," Cunningham says. Her work was complicated because enslaved people's names usually changed with the transfer of ownership.

Searches among dusty records were intermittent at first, tucked into the busy hours of a mother caring for both an infant and a toddler. Her husband's military service eventually took them far from her hometown, but Cunningham resumed her work whenever she returned to Portsmouth.

When she reached the mid-19th century, she found that the end of slavery made African Americans harder to trace in local records. So she began at the other end of history, collecting oral histories from elders in Portsmouth's black community.

This was her favorite part of the work, because many of the interview subjects played a significant role in her life as she grew up in a community with few African Americans. "They mentored me, inspired me. I didn't want them to die without seeing this story told and contributing to it," she says.

Although facts and dates and places are important, Cunningham's perseverance to find history's "missing persons" really has been a search for stories that show how history is often made up of the stuff of everyday lives, she says.

Continuing support

Armed with her research, the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail committee—a group of volunteers that she oversees—created the trail, an evolution that took three years and continues today. Bronze plaques mark some sites along the trail, but about \$50,000 must be raised to put a marker at each stop.

Financial support has come from local foundations, organizations, churches, businesses, and individuals.

Her home state has honored her efforts with its annual Martin Luther King Jr. Award and, more recently, a University of New Hampshire President's Award of Excellence.

But the best reward of all, she says, is that people of all races are now embracing the black history she has uncovered as a part of everyone's story.

Phyllis Edgerly Ring has published more than 900 articles, essays, and short stories in magazines. Her latest book project explores the experiences of both black and white Americans during the era of Civil Rights and desegregation. A former nurse and the mother of two, she often writes on issues of family life, parenting, spirituality, health, and culture. <http://www.phyllisring.com>

Jayne Thurber-Smith

The Query Letter

First & Last Name, Editor
Christian Women Today
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Editor's Last Name,

I would like to share with your readers a look behind the scenes of Gospel singer Pam Thum's ministry. This piece would run around 500 words and could be ready whenever you want it.

I'm a fulltime freelance writer with articles printed in such publications as Today's Parent, Sports Spectrum, Buffalo News and Chicken Soup for the Soul. A sample of my writing can be found at: <http://gp4k.com/sports/Article.asp?ID=318>

I work well with deadlines and would love the chance to work with you. If this article does not suit your editorial needs at this time, please consider me for future assignments. Thank you for your time.

Yours very truly,

Jayne Thurber-Smith
Freelance Writer

The Published Sample

There's Healing And Hope For The Weary

By Jayne Thurber-Smith

Nine years ago, Pam Thum signed a recording contract and began her ministry of Christian music. With her Shania Twain-looks, God-given talent and velvety-smooth voice she could have succeeded in any music venue. However, as her website, www.pamthum.org states, she has chosen many of her songs to carry the Lord's message of healing and hope for the weary. She knows whereof she sings.

"My daddy was an evangelist so I traveled a lot growing up," says Pam. "I felt I didn't have any real stability other than Jesus. He became my best Friend. We would only stay in an area one month or so at a time but I learned that Jesus would always be my rock. Good-byes and insecurity made me hold onto Him."

From her past experiences and from meeting different kinds of people from all walks of life, Pam knows the message of God's love is one that everyone needs to hear.

"I've seen the elite rich and seen the same loneliness and emptiness in their eyes as in the person's eyes who lives on the streets," she says. "And their pain matches the same root of pain I feel when I've been misunderstood and alone."

In the midst of a self-oriented society, Pam's music and ministry advocates having a thankful heart.

"My husband Steve (Marshall) and I have come to realize that the most powerful ingredients needed to keep our relationship healthy are to be thankful to God and to believe," says Pam. "Without faith it's impossible to please God. Faith is something you have to do even when you don't feel like it."

Steve is also a gospel recording artist and they travel throughout North America together singing the good news of God's love. This couple who is constantly ministering to others makes sure to keep in contact with different ministries to stay straight in their own Christian walk. They have pastors/friends who check in with them for prayer requests and send them preaching cassettes, which they listen to while driving from one church to the next.

They make a solid team who share a true love for one another.

"We keep our marriage strong with very basic steps," says Pam. "First of all, we praise the Lord together. Second, we also laugh a lot, which is important because the joy of the Lord is our strength. Third, we get excited about each other's accomplishments. Fourth, we watch what we say and attack the problem, not the person."

Pam pauses, then adds what she thinks has helped her marriage the most.

There's Healing And Hope For The Weary, Continued

"Always be thinking, 'What good thing can say I today?' It takes five seconds and no energy whatsoever to compliment a job well done, like taking out the garbage or making lunch. Those kinds of things keep any relationship alive and we're learning to work on them."

Sometimes the weary are right in front of us and we need to help them heal.

Jayne Thurber-Smith has written for various publications, including Today's Parent, Living Light News and Sports Spectrum. She and her husband live in Niagara Falls and enjoy family church services and watching their four children play sports.

LuAnn Womach

The Query Letter

First Last Name, Editor
Rural Electric Nebraska
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

January 29, 2002

Dear Editor's Last Name:

Superman and Batman battled hardened criminals. Detective and Keen Detective Mysteries brought gripping thrillers to life. And The Funny Pages boasted that (reading) it was "more fun than a side show." These comic book titles, now considered part of the Golden Age era, entertained readers during the 1930s and 1940s.

For one young Nebraska boy, Wausu native Lamont Larson, the comics were read, stored, and for the most part, forgotten. Today, to those associated with Larson, he's a retired English teacher who enjoys Husker football and possesses a voracious appetite for the written word. But to the world of comic collectors, he's known as the king of comics.

Would you be interested in a 1500-word article featuring Nebraska native Lamont Larson and the famed comic collection named for him? The article focuses on the Larson's childhood, when he began reading comics, and the journey of a Connecticut comic collector who searched for the "missing" Larson. I'll include interviews with both Larson and collector Jon Berk, in addition to a comic restorationist who has worked with several books in the Larson collection. I can provide color slides or prints to enhance the article.

My writing credentials include op-ed pieces at www.lovestories.com, education features in Education-World, and essays in several anthologies. As a former teacher, I've penned over 100 articles for local newspapers.

A stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience. May I hear from you soon?

Sincerely,

LuAnn Womach
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

Enc

The Published Sample

The Kings of Comics

By LuAnn Womach

Superman and Batman battled hardened criminals. Detective and Keen Detective Mysteries brought gripping thrillers to life. And The Funny Pages boasted that (reading) it was "more fun than a side show." These comic book titles, now considered part of the Golden Age era, entertained readers during the 1930s and 1940s.

For one young Nebraska boy, Wausa native Lamont Larson, the comics were read, stored, and for the most part, forgotten. Today, to those associated with Larson, he's a retired English teacher who enjoys Husker football and possesses a voracious appetite for the written word. But to the world of comic collectors, he's known as the king of comics.

Lamont Larson was born on June 30, 1927, in Wausa, a small town situated 35 miles south of Yankton. Larson's boyhood years included school and movies. His parents, Olga and Paul, and his grandmother, Mary Gropper, owned and operated the Empress Theater on Wausa's main street.

Larson's parents supported education and wanted the best instruction possible for their son. Around the age of nine, Larson started reading comics. "I always liked comics in the daily and especially the Sunday paper," stated Larson. His parents believed the ten-cent investment was worthwhile.

Larson wanted to guarantee he wouldn't miss an issue of the new comics that were delivered to Wausa's Creutz Drug Store by either Publisher's News or Omaha News. Owner Fred Creutz mentioned the store would reserve the comics by writing Larson's name on the books. Lamont agreed, and store employees Tryg Hagen and Cecil Coop were responsible for inscribing Larson's name on the covers.

As the years passed, Larson's taste in reading material changed, and by the time he began high school, mysteries and aviation interested him. The comics were packed and placed in a storage room in the family home. In 1940, when the Larson's moved across town, the comics also took up residence in a new locale - the barn. And this is where the books remained for nearly 35 years, out of sight and particularly, out of Larson's mind.

Larson graduated as salutatorian from Wausa High School in 1944 and graduated from Yankton College in 1949. He taught in St. Edward and Genoa before taking an assignment in Meadow Grove. During a basketball game against Oakdale, Larson met Barbara Fields. In 1956, the couple married and accepted teaching positions in Clay Center, Nebraska. They've called the South Central Nebraska town home since.

In 1973, following the death of Larson's father, Olga Larson hired a local antique dealer and handyman to assist cleaning out the barn. Dwaine Nelson spied the comics and asked Mrs. Larson if he could purchase the books, which were in cardboard boxes. Amazingly, most of the books maintained white pages. Not only did she sell the comics, but also included in the deal were magazines, including *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers*.

Nearly a year and a half later, Nelson sold the comics at a flea market to Joe Triarichi, a small comics dealer from the Cleveland, Ohio, area. The final price was somewhere between \$50 and \$100 dollars. For the next 20 years, Triarichi slowly sold the books that were now known as "the Larson comics." Jon Berk, a comic enthusiast from Connecticut, purchased several.

"I purchased some books by coincidence because they coincided with my search for books from the late 1930s and early 1940s," Berk commented.

But the comic world didn't know who "Lamont Larson" was. Had it not been for Berk's interest in the books, the story might end at this point. But with determination and luck, Berk located Larson, who, as a young boy, had accumulated a collection of Golden Age comics that form one of the most collectible and recognizable pedigree set of comic books today.

In 1993, Larson retired from a 37-year teaching career in the Clay Center school system. By this time, his paperback and hardback book collection had taken over the house, and he would delve into the books he didn't have a chance to read while still teaching.

About a month after retirement, Larson received an unusual phone call from Berk, who proclaimed that he "had finally found Larson." Larson's reply: "I didn't realize I was lost." Berk related the odyssey of the comic books, and the two shared information concerning the comics.

But exactly how did Berk find Larson? A fellow collector approached Berk with *All Star Comics 1*, claiming it was a Larson, even though the book didn't contain the discernable markings. "By chance, Larson had filled out the coupon for some contest but did not cut it out.

Several books are defaced because he did cut the coupon from the book. It had an address of Wausa, Nebraska," noted Berk.

Berk called telephone information and received three Larson listings for the Northeast Nebraska town. He dialed the first number and reached Maude Larson, who isn't related. Berk asked if she knew how to reach Lamont.

Maude commented, "I can't tell you, but I'm sure his mother can." Maude told Berk that Lamont's mother was living at the Wausa Nursing Center. Berk called and spoke with her, explaining that he possessed several of the Larson comic books and had been attempting to locate her son. Olga, then 96, remembered the comics and the fact that Creutz Drug had written Lamont's name on the books. She put Berk in contact with Lamont.

The phone conversation involved Berk's attempts to ensure Larson that he was interested in the comics he collected as a young boy. According to Larson, "I did not collect them; I read them." Larson acknowledges that the phone call came as a total surprise; however, he is pleased that the books are highly regarded to comic collectors. What makes this collection so interesting to the comic world? "Knowledge of origin and scope of collection, which is extremely rare, adds a certain mystic to the collection," quipped Berk.

Luckily, Triarichi made a "Larson list" when he purchased the books. The Larson collection is comprised of approximately 1000 books. According to Berk, there is an Action 1 which could bring \$200,000. Added Berk, "While many Larson's are quite nice, many have defects that keep them out of high grade range. Larson's could be identified by the name. Unfortunately, this did not occur until mid-1939 so many so-called Larson's have been anonymously assimilated into the collecting world. However, there are no Larson's cover dated after September 1941. Initial buyers of these books would try to erase the name from the cover - a perceived defect." Interestingly, the signature, whether apparent or erased, is always in the upper left hand quarter of the comic. Occasionally, Larson comics are available online at Metropolis Collectibles or the popular auction site, eBay. Sotheby's of New York featured a Larson Marvel Number 1 a few years ago, along with several other high-profile comics from other collections. "We (comic collectors) are not that big as a hobby so there is only a small pool to appeal to," adds Berk.

According to Matt Nelson, a comic restorationist, "For the collector who is looking for a very nice, high grade, white paged comic that might have some writing and foxing, Larson books are perfect. Keep in mind, some Larson's are the best existing copy - even better than the Mile High or San Francisco collections."

Whether laughing at the antics of Mutt and Jeff or anticipating the mystery of The Shadow, it's obvious that a young boy's love of reading and his parent's approval of this new type of entertainment turned into one of the world's most prestigious comic collections.

Lee Ann Womach is a freelance writer.

Kate MacNeil

The Query Letter

First Last Name, Editor
Simple Joy Magazine
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

Date

Dear Editor's Last Name:

I was the ultimate multi-tasker. Doing only two things at once seemed like a waste of time, I couldn't conceive of only doing one. I devoured magazine articles on how to make better use of my time. Then at the mall one day, I stepped on the escalator and, exhausted from my hectic life, I just rode it. I didn't run up it, like I usually did. I didn't even walk up it. For the first time in my adult life, I stood still and let the escalator do the work. It was the first of many baby steps toward a calmer, saner lifestyle.

These days we're bombarded with advice on how to do more in the time we have. Every magazine at the supermarket boasts of articles on how to accomplish more, faster, better. Multi-taking, the phrase coined to describe doing more than one task at a time, is a way of life for many women as we try to fit in all our responsibilities and still have time for ourselves. The sad fact is, in the end we often still don't take the time we need to rejuvenate. On top of that, studies are now showing that, rather than free up time and lower stress levels, multi-tasking creates stress and increases our workloads.

My article, "One Thing At A Time", focuses on how to get off the multi-tasking rat race and take time to relax and enjoy life one task at a time. It is 1500 words and is aimed at women 30 to 55. It includes suggestions on how to slow down and comments from women who have made changes how often they multi-task and how it's affected their lives.

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely

Kate MacNeil
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

The Published Sample

One Thing At A Time

By Kate MacNeil

I was the ultimate multi-tasker. I balanced my checkbook at the doctor's office, ironed while I helped with homework and always checked my e-mail during phone conversations. Doing only two things at once seemed like a waste of time; I couldn't conceive of only doing one. I devoured magazine articles on how to make better use of my time, feeling that if I could just combine enough activities, I would finally have time to spend on my own activities such as painting, rock climbing and sleeping.

Yet no matter how hard I tried, it wasn't working. The more I layered my activities, the less time I had. And while the work got done, it wasn't getting done well. I often had to go back and correct mistakes or do a task over again because I hadn't paid enough attention the first time. Meanwhile I felt like the tasks had taken on a life of their own – or, more accurately, my life. I rushed from one chore to another, never completing anything to my satisfaction and feeling guilty if I slowed down.

Then one day at the mall I stepped on the escalator and, exhausted from my hectic life, I just rode it. I didn't run up it like I usually did. I didn't even walk up it. For the first time in my adult life, I stood still and let the escalator do the work.

"You know," said a little voice inside my head, "you don't have to live like this. It's all right to ride the escalator." This little nudge became the first of many baby steps toward a calmer, saner lifestyle.

Multi-tasking – doing two or more tasks at the same time --is increasingly encouraged in society today, with technology making it possible to be working and on call 24 hours a day. And the pressure to do more and become more involved can become overwhelming, especially for women who already juggle the responsibilities of home, work and children. So we look to multi-tasking to help us do everything at once.

Studies however, are starting to show that multi-tasking actually increases our stress levels and decreases the amount of work we can do. In one study, 36 adults were instructed to complete a series of mathematical problems. The first set was multiplication, but the second set alternated between multiplication and division. During the set in which they switched back and forth, the participants performed 20 to 30 percent slower. The study concluded that switching between activities decreased the quality of performance. After analyzing the data, at least one expert felt that if you can avoid it, don't multi-task, especially if the tasks are important or complex.

Constant multi-tasking can make it seem like you never complete a task or are working all the time. Single mom of two boy Betty Jo found that happened when she did housework.

“Instead of just vacuuming the living room and continuing on to the next room, I would start to dust and any number of tasks while in that room. It took forever to get the vacuuming done. Now I just stick to my plan.”

Other drawbacks to multi-tasking include:

Memory impairment – since we are giving less attention to the activities and conversations we participate in, we are less likely to remember details. Or information can be coming at us so fast (like when we’re checking our e-mail and talking on the phone at the same time) that we don’t really have time to absorb it.

Dangerous activities – one of the most dangerous multi-tasking activities is talking on a cell phone (or doing anything else) while driving. It’s estimated that at least 4,000 accidents a day originate from drivers not paying attention to driving. Instead they are eating, making phone calls, applying make-up or, as in the case of one of my friends, changing their nylons. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, there is a four-times greater risk of collision when using the phone while driving.

Fragmented perspective – Trying to fire off one item after another can keep us from focusing on the bigger picture. Maybe I can iron, talk on the phone, watch TV, help my kids with their homework and make supper all at once, but how is this helping me achieve my goals? Do I even know what my goals are? Often we are so busy doing things that we miss taking the time needed to reflect on what it is we’re doing and why we’re doing it.

Diminished relationships – When we allow tasks to intrude on relationship building times, the relationship suffers. During one recent phone call from a friend, she left me on hold three times while she answered her call waiting. By the end of our call, I felt more like I had taken up her valuable time rather than spent quality time with a friend. And I when I phone my husband at work, I can tell he’s checking his e-mail by the long silences from his end of the phone followed by him asking me to repeat what I just said.

Less than full participation in life – It’s hard to give of yourself fully when you are performing several activities. Some things, like laundry, don’t need your full attention. Other things, like reading to your children or talking with your spouse, do.

So how do we get off the multi-tasking treadmill? One baby step at a time.

Catch a vision – What do you want to accomplish in your life? Do you want to travel the world? Maybe you’d like to be more involved with your community or spend more of time with your family. What ever your goal is, once you know what you want, it’s easier to subtract the things that don’t move you closer to your goals.

And your goal doesn’t have to be big. Jennifer had a dream of spending evenings with her children, reading and playing together. However, by the time she made supper, took them to and from their various activities, and got them ready for bed, the evening was gone. Eventually she restricted each child to one activity per season, preferably one on the weekend. Her week nights became much calmer and she was able to have the quiet family evenings she dreamed of.

Simplify – Several years ago I came across the phrase “blessed subtraction” to describe simplifying life by removing activities and items which have no lasting value or do not bring us closer to our goal. Do you really need a fax machine, e-mail, instant messaging, text messaging, cell phone, pager and PDA? How about all those magazines waiting to be read? Take a good look at your life and see if any areas can benefit from “blessed subtraction”.

“I stopped painting my fingernails,” Lindsay told me. “I would always do something else at the same time, which would mess up the polish. So I made the choice, and gave up nail polish.”

Invest in relationships – when you have to choose, choose people over machines. Avoid the temptations to dash off a quick e-mail while talking on the phone. Read with your kids rather than vacuum. The dust will be there another day, trust me.

I knew I needed to take time out for friends when I found myself inviting Joyce to go grocery shopping with me. I hadn't seen her in ages and it was the only “free” time I had coming up. I made a few cancellations and went for coffee with her instead.

Prioritize -- decide ahead of time what needs to be done, then stick to your plan. Rebeca works for an extremely fast-paced company that manages hospitals and medical office campuses nationwide.

“When I began this job, I would work on something until my boss came flying into my office and handed me another “emergency”. I would then drop what I was doing and work on that problem until, inevitably, my boss would come racing by again with another dilemma that needed my “immediate” attention. I was so stressed by the end of that week that I seriously considered quitting my job. I was working 10-11 hour days, but had not closed any of the files by week's end!

Then I learned the value of the “To Do” list. As my boss brings me situations to handle, I jot them down on my “To Do” list. I work through the list, one thing at a time, until they're all done. I have a beautiful list of little checked off boxes by week's end! Compare that to my old feeling of having nothing accomplished after 10 hours of hard work and you can see why I love my list so much!

I'll admit, situations still crop up that force me to put down what I'm working on and tend to them, but I'm getting better and better at judging the true seriousness of any problem.

And, to top it all off, I'm better able to remember what I did with each individual file even weeks after it's done! I'm guessing that's because, when I was working on it, I gave it my undivided attention and my mind was able to store it in memory.”

Use restraint -- save multi-tasking for things you don't like doing and aren't challenging. Fold laundry while you watch TV, listen to the radio while you work out. Some multi-tasking is fine, but remember to ask yourself, “if it's not worth doing alone, is it worth doing with something else?”

Live in the moment – concentrate fully on the task at hand. While you're cooking, take the time to enjoy the aromas, tastes and textures of the meal your preparing. If you're gardening, stop and literally smell the roses (or pansies or carrots).

Save time for yourself -- Find activities that you can lose yourself in and resist the temptation to squeeze in chores like laundry or dusting. Some activities, like walking, yoga, journaling and reading force you to slow down. Even an hour can make a big difference.

Many religious traditions include prayer and meditation. Tonya, a young mother of three takes time out daily. "Because of my low energy level," she says, "I find that I have to take time out to "de-stress" and stop doing stuff every day. I don't like to be busy and I certainly don't feel a need to be busy!! Also, I usually spend up to 2 hours a day doing something quiet; mostly prayer and Bible study."

Make a point of spending five minutes a day just sitting without doing anything else. Everyone can spare five minutes and it can be the start you need to begin slowing down. According to French philosopher Blaise Pascal, "all man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone."

Kate MacNeil is a freelance writer from Nova Scotia, where she lives with her husband Mark and three boys, Nathan, Liam and Sam.

Yvonne Lanelli

The Query Letter

First Last Name, Editor
Podiatry Management
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

Date

Dear Last Name,

Bruce Meyers, DPM, claims two world records: “I am the only American who has rafted the River Katun in Siberia three times. And I am the only American to paddle a supply boat down the Katun—and I did that twice!” His patients know him as a popular Rochester, Michigan podiatrist, but when he swaps white doctor coat for helmet, life vest and oars, Dr. Meyers becomes “Rafterguy,” whitewater oarsman of exotic locales and self-proclaimed world record setter. That his claims are neither verified nor challenged doesn’t faze the genial oarsman. His paddle-dipping quests in Chile’s Patagonia, India, Tibet, Siberia, China, Ecuador and Canada as well as many places in the US must by themselves qualify as some sort of record. Of his second trip down the Katun, for example, “I was the only American among 30 Russians for ten days. While waiting to join the group, I explored a Siberian city alone for three days—and I don’t speak Russian!”

He’s done initial descents (rivers not rafted commercially before) in China, Tibet, Labrador and Chile (and will do another in Siberia in July, 2004.) These initial descents often involved treks into countryside where no foreigner had been seen before. His tales of such encounters will enthrall your readers, both seasoned voyager and armchair traveler.

I am a freelance writer/photographer who recently rafted with Dr. Meyers in Siberia. My article, “Row, row, row your boat, violently down the stream” profiles Dr. Meyers and his unique adventures, capturing his enthusiasm for the sport as well as his engaging personality. At 2,000 words, “Row, row. . .” will fit perfectly in your interview/profile section about interesting podiatrists. My research also includes interviews with Steve Currey of Currey Expeditions in Provo, Utah and with Sasha Tokarev of Team Gorky in Russia, as well as others. Color action photos by me and by Dr. Meyers will excite your readers. (One of Dr. Meyers’ photos appeared in the November, 2003 issue of National Geographic Adventure.) Upon acceptance, “Row, row. . .” can be ready within four weeks.

I have been writing professionally since 1985, specializing in personality profiles, travel and outdoor adventure articles in regional and national publications. My work received awards from New Mexico PressWomen and the National Association of PressWomen. According to your Writer's Market listing and back issues, you prefer E-mail queries. Rather than load your computer with attached clips, I will fax or send them US mail if you request. You may contact me by E-mail, US Mail, phone or fax as listed below.

"Row, row. . ." both entertains and inspires your readers, especially those who dream of getting away from the office for an exotic adventure—and who doesn't? Thank you for your consideration of my proposal. I look forward to your positive reply.

Sincerely,

Yvonne Lanelli
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

The Published Sample

Row, Row, Row Your Boat, Violently Down The Stream...

By Yvonne Lanelli

Bruce Meyers claims two world records. "I am the only American to raft the River Katun in Siberia three times. And I am the only American to paddle a supply boat down the Katun— twice! And I can even claim a third record—I'll bet I'm the only American podiatrist to do this!"

His patients know him as Dr. Meyers, popular Rochester, Michigan foot specialist. But when he swaps white doctor coat for life vest, helmet and oars, he becomes "Rafterguy," whitewater oarsman of exotic locales and self-proclaimed world record holder.

That his claims are neither verified nor challenged doesn't faze this genial oarsman. Instead he chuckles a soft, bass laugh and offers, "Well, I've whitewater rafted all over the United States, the Yukon in Canada, Ecuador, Chile, Labrador, China, India, and Siberia—some of those more than once. That must be some kind of record. And many of those trips were initial descents [rivers not rafted commercially before]. I've done those in Tibet, Chile, Canada and India."

Then his dark blue eyes take on a softer look as he begins to reminisce. "Ah-h-h, those Katun trips... I did three of them in a little over one year. The first, in September of 2002, was with Steve Currey Expeditions from Provo, Utah and Russian outfitters, Team Gorky. It was my first time in Siberia and I really liked the whitewater—Class IV and V rapids—and the Siberian people. When I was requested to return a few months later, I jumped at the chance. Turned out that second trip was the most memorable."

Prior to joining Team Gorky in Barnaul, Siberia, Bruce scheduled extra days in this isolated yet charming city. “For three days I explored Barnaul on my own-- no tour guide or guide book--just riding the trolley, walking, looking and asking.” Speaking no more Russian than “Dobre outra (good morning) and “spasiba” (thank you), he delved all through Barnaul, a small industrial city. Parks, neighborhoods, domed churches, broad boulevards, monuments, restaurants, the cinema, sidewalk vendors, grocery stores, and government buildings— all became Bruce’s domain. Ever get lost? “No, I just hopped the next trolley back. If I needed help, I just asked someone and smiled. I always got a friendly response. Of course, sometimes I wasn’t sure what they were saying, but nobody led me astray.”

When Team Gorky and their rafting clients joined Bruce in Barnaul, he was surprised to discover himself the only American among 30 Russians. “I don’t speak Russian. One of the staff and one of the Russian rafting clients spoke some English.” Nevertheless, over the next ten days, Bruce and his new acquaintances became fast friends. “We just used a lot of gestures and smiles.” Photographs helped, too.

His albums overflow with congenial faces eager to pose for their new friend. Bruce calls himself Currey Expedition’s unofficial brochure photographer. With his long lens and fast shutter, Bruce captures many candid and action shots that later appear in Steve Currey Expedition brochures. “My photos have also been used on American and Russian websites and in the November, 2003 issue of National Geographic Adventure.” Back home, his office staff mount their favorite pictures on office walls, tantalizing his patients.

On this trip Bruce achieved his goal of rowing the supply boat, a giant inflatable rubber raft into which are lashed every ounce of food and water, cooking utensils, all tents and sleeping bags—in short, everything necessary for the group’s survival. While the rafters themselves surmount the rapids in teams consisting of eight members, each team member stroking with a single paddle, the supply boat rower maneuvers his cumbersome craft solo, wielding a pair of giant oars. If the supply boat flips, the group is in trouble. This is, after all, Siberia, the classic “middle of nowhere.”

Bruce continues, “This trip differed from the first one in that we did the Chuya, a Katun tributary, and then the Katun. Once we left the Chuya, I knew I could row but the staff were at first unsure of my skills. So a staff member rode with me for the first hour or so.” Bruce’s six-foot, two-inch well-muscled frame proved worthy of the arduous task. “After a few rapids, he [a Team Gorky staffer] saw I wasn’t going to lose our lunch and left in the kayak!” Bruce happily rowed the rest of the trip—and claimed his world records.

This trip also deepened his respect and love of the Russian people, particularly Siberians who seldom see an American. “They are so warm and friendly. They love Americans and are eager to show it.” He remains in contact with some of the Russians he met on that trip.

Bruce was content with his self-proclaimed record of being the only American to run the Katun twice and the only American to ever row a supply boat down it, but Team Gorky beckoned again a few weeks later. “I almost said ‘no’ because I didn’t want to spoil my prior experience. This group was mostly American, and I knew it couldn’t compare.”

Nevertheless Bruce succumbed to temptation. On August 29, 2003, he flew to Moscow to begin his third adventure on the Katun.

“On this trip I helped out with the American rafters who had never been to Russia before.” As unofficial assistant to Sasha Tokarev, Team Gorky’s leader, Bruce fielded the Americans’ questions about Moscow, Siberia, rafting on the Katun and so forth. In Barnaul, while Sasha wrestled with equipment and staff logistics, Bruce guided the Americans around town, sharing his favorite sites.

And, of course, once on the Katun, he again rowed the massive supply boat, skillfully guiding it day after day through rapid after rapid. On the third day the group encountered the most difficult challenge of the week’s voyage, the Shabash. Here, a monstrous breaking wave leads to two huge sections of rapids, each a network of whirlpools, boulders, backwashes, sinkholes and giant wave trains. Once a raft enters the Shabash, it disappears around a bend before reaching calm water.

One of the American rafters recalls, “We had put into shore to scout it. Sasha, the crew and rafters gathered on a boulder over-looking Shabash and analyzed every maneuver—go far to the left here, then a quick right there, and so forth. Each raft would go one at a time. Bruce didn’t say anything, just looked and stroked his beard. Last year on his first Katun trip, the raft he was riding in had flipped here. No one had been hurt, but no one wanted to repeat the flip if we could help it. We were quiet as we boarded the rafts and took up our paddles.”

There were seventeen in all —seven from Team Gorky, six American rafters, three Russian rafters and Bruce in the supply boat. Two Team Gorky guides, Nicky and Anton, went ahead in the safety kayaks. Like porpoises, they dived into the first whirlpool and sinkhole combination. When they disappeared into white water, all held a collective breath, but a second or two later, they popped up and slithered out. Everyone cheered. Then it was the first raft’s turn. It approached the first breaking wave. Slower than the kayaks, the big raft lumbered into the center of the river and entered on target. Its eight paddlers negotiated all the hazards and disappeared around the bend before exiting into calm water. Cheers again.

The American rafter continues, “Then it was our turn. Sergei, our Team Gorky captain, shouted “Piriot!” (Forward); we stroked in rhythm and hit the first rapid.” Cold glacial melt water drenched them, sucking their breath away. As they swirled through the treacherous Shabash, Sergei ordered “Nahzad!” “Prava!” or “Leva!” (Back, right or left) and the rowers obeyed instantly. Several heart-pounding minutes later the second raft had cleared the Shabash and drifted into calm water with the other raft. “We high-fived with our paddles then turned to see Bruce and the supply boat. But there was no sign of him!” They waited for what seemed an eternity. Had he flipped in the maw of the Shabash? Just when they were considering sending a kayak to search for him, he appeared—upright, drenched and smiling. “We cheered again. Supper and our night’s shelters were safe!”

That evening at dinner the rafters asked Bruce what had taken him so long. He smiled quietly and replied, “I was taking pictures of you guys from the shore. You looked like surfacing submarines! Then it took me a while to return and launch the supply boat back into the center of the river by myself.” When Bruce and the supply boat hit that first breaking wave, it sucked the boat entirely under water. “I never felt the cold water; I was thinking ‘What’s happening to my boat?’ I knew the boat was still with me because I still held on to the oars!” Then the supply boat surfaced with all hands and supplies intact. “This is the only time I’ve seen a raft so covered with water that only the oarsman’s head stuck out—and it was mine!” Nobody was around to record Bruce’s feat on film or tape. “Glad I had one kayaker to share the visuals,” Bruce deadpanned.

In the world of international rafters, Bruce considers himself the new kid on the block, having rafted only ten years or so. He jokes about “falling in with the wrong crowd” and ending up on the international circuit that explores rivers not rafted commercially before, treks referred to as initial descents. One such journey took place in Labrador in northeastern Canada. “To this day I don’t remember the name of the river. All I remember were the mosquitoes.

They were so thick, so loud, so large and so many of them we couldn’t hear each other talk. Obviously, that river will never be rafted commercially!”

One of his favorite initial descents was the Po Tsang Po in Tibet. “Just getting to the river itself was an adventure. We drove for three days through the most beautiful scenery—it was phenomenal. We went into places where the locals claimed there had never been foreigners before.”

In northeast India, he initially descended the Sutlej, a large river that runs out of Tibet and into northern India and Pakistan. He was one of three Americans in three boats acting as guides with an additional Indian oarsman. Bruce rowed the lead boat. “We were on the river for five days. First, we explored different parts of India from the Taj Mahal in Agra to Jaipur through New Delhi and the Golden Triangle. Then we went up the river to the province of Himachal Pradesh and the city of Shimla, the Summer Capital used by the British. We then went on to Mashobra.”

In South America, he did an initial descent of both the Figueroa and a trip from Argentina across Chile to an island in the ocean fiords in Chile’s Patagonia. The “Fig” trip during February, 2002 resulted in an article accompanied by his photo in National Geographic Adventure. “I rowed the lead boat here, too. We were on the water six days.” The Futaleufu, located from the Argentina-Chile border, required a three-day horseback ride to get to the next river over the Andes Mountains to continue to the ocean. “It’s rafted commercially now, but in a shortened version than what we did.”

What further adventures does the intrepid oarsman anticipate? “I’m doing the Fig again in February—this time just for fun. But in November, 2005, I’ll rejoin Steve for another initial descent. This one will be the Mangde Chhu in Bhutan. That should be fun.”

And it should be another world record for...“Rafterguy.”

Outdoor adventure writer/photographer Yvonne Lanelli takes her readers rafting, biking, skiing, diving, caving, hiking or parasailing in the mountains of her southern New Mexico home as well as on all seven continents. Join her in Antarctica, Siberia, Central America, New York City or the South Pacific in her award-winning column "Follow Me!" which appears in the Alamogordo (NM) Daily News (www.alamogordonews.com) or visit her website www.zianet.com/lanelli.

Terri Pilcher

The Query Letter

First Last Name, Editor
Physician
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

Date

Dear Last Name,

"The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat," says a popular television sports announcement about the excitement of watching athletic events. That's how we tend to see loss. Loss is defeat, failure, and death. When I graduated with a physician assistant license, I experienced both of those things - the thrill of graduation and the agony of not getting a job. I was pregnant and considered unemployable. Like the small child in my womb who underwent apoptosis to change a paddle into a hand, I went through a painful spiritual apoptosis that made me more useful to God.

"Joyful Christian Apoptosis" is a 1,000-word article about my painful start in the medical world and how, like an unborn child, God killed part of me to make me a useful vessel for him. This is not a negative article. Far from it. God sometimes allows difficult things to happen in our lives to make us more flexible in our ability to serve Him. Rather than asking God, "Why me?", we can ask, "What for?" and say, "Thank you for carrying me through".

Because of my difficult start, I became a stay-at-home mother of four, a professional writer, and a college professor of nursing students (all at the same time). I thank God for the difficulties in my life that have brought me to a place where I am learning to serve Him more each day.

I have published articles in On Mission, Men of Integrity, Spirit Led Writer, Physician Assistant Journal, Advance for Physician Assistants, and many more.

Thank you for considering "Joyful Christian Apoptosis",

Terri Pilcher
Street Address
City, State, Zip
Phone Number

The Published Sample

Joyful Christian Apoptosis

By Terri Pilcher

After two years of grueling study, I was thrilled when I graduated with my master's degree in health sciences and a physician assistant license. That thrill soon gave way to a sense of defeat: I was five months pregnant with my first child - and no one would hire me.

My future as I'd planned it was taken away, and it was all God's fault. I spent my pregnancy complaining angrily to Him. I'd fight and cry, and then pat my belly and say, "I still love you, Baby. It's not your fault."

During that time of depression, I read every verse in the Bible about parenting, motherhood, the womb and pre-born children. Psalm 127:3 says, "Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him." I knew my child was supposed to be a blessing to my life, but she sure didn't feel like one.

My thoughts changed when I put together a personal devotional comparing the growth of a pre-born child to spiritual growth. God wasn't deserting me. He was listening to my anguished cries, and I knew I needed to work through my anger and disappointment.

In my devotional, I noted that a child's fingers start to form during the second month in the womb. The ends of the arms are flippers up to this point. Through apoptosis, cells die between the phalanges, separating them and creating fingers.

Fingers made her hands dexterous, able to grasp objects and perform tasks that would be impossible for flippers: writing letters, playing piano or communicating with sign language.

Like my pre-born child's flippers, God was making way for a new part of my life to emerge, making me a more useful servant to Him. I learned the meaning of Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." He graciously replaced my goals and dreams with four children, a freelance writing career, an adjunct faculty position, a future open to His plans and a more fulfilling life than I ever expected. I used to worry about the enormous debt I brought into my marriage, but I've discovered that my husband needs me as a support at home more than he needs me to bring in income.

For the child, the process of apoptosis is painless. The DNA in the cells separates into millions of small pieces. The dead cells separate from living cells and form small apoptotic bodies, which are then absorbed by neighboring cells and integrated into the being of those cells.

Like those apoptotic bodies, my dreams aren't over. My desire to heal the sick has been reintegrated into the bandaging of skinned knees and passing on my knowledge to future nurses. My yearning to work professionally has transformed into home schooling and a writing career. I'm as driven and goal-oriented as ever, but I pray through my decisions so that I will use the time God has given me as wisely as possible.

Will I ever work as a PA? I don't believe that's in God's plan, but I'm open to the possibility. God has already used my medical education in ways I never expected. Either way, I can trust in the Lord for my future.

When painful events take place, I've learned to stop asking God, "Why me?" and instead ask, "What for?" - all the while saying, "Thank You for carrying me through." Knowing that God has a good purpose for my life doesn't take away all the pains and heartaches, but it does give me the courage to keep walking through times of trial.

Teri Pilcher is a freelance Christian writer, marketing columnist, and owner of a marketing database geared towards helping writers spend less time researching paying markets and more time writing for them. Visit her at:
<http://www.powerpenmarketsearch.com>

Bad Query Letter Samples

It's important to remember that query letters are the first thing editors see. You **MUST** put some thought and effort into your query letter if you want any hope of having your idea accepted. It doesn't matter if the publication pays \$20 or \$2,000 per article, editors work hard and they are tired of seeing their publications and status taken lightly.

If you're going to ask an editor to consider your idea for publication, take the time to draft a good query letter. Make sure your query letter:

- addresses the right editor
- is free of grammar and spelling errors
- is properly formatted
- has a strong lead
- captures the essence of the article you want to write—without giving away the full storyline
- provides your current contact information

Take a look at the following query letters. Do you know why these query letters are bad? If not, go back to the beginning of this e-book and read about what query letters are.

Sample #1

Dear Editor,

I have several stories I would love to share with you. Are you interested?

Signed: author's first name

(Editor's note: This query has absolutely no value and is a total waste of both the editor's and the writer's time. What articles? What are they about? What area of the publication will they target? Are they originals or reprints?)

Sample #2

Dear Editor,

Below is my article I'm submitting for your consideration. I own all rights.

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: What is wrong with the first sentence?)

Sample #3

Dear Editor,

I am new to writing, and have never been published, I would really be honored if you would publish my article in your magazine, please, please, please. It would be such a wonderful birthday gift to see my article in your publication.

Signed: Thank you, author's last name

(Editor's note: It's not a good idea to tell an editor you've never been published. Let your writing speak for itself. And never beg the editor to give you a writing assignment or try to guilt him (or her) into doing so. And watch those commas!)

Sample #4

Dear Editor,

I have been published in (lists 10 different publications by name). I am a professional writer. I would be perfect for your publication because my writing style encompasses your overall feel. If you'd like I can send you a copy of my resume. The article I want to write for you is (article's title). It is about (synopsis).

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: Starting a query letter off with a complete list of your accomplishments is boring and bragging. Save the clips for the end of your query letter and only include credentials that are relevant to the article and/or publication. There's no need to mention you're a professional writer and definitely no need to state how you believe you, as a writer, would be a good fit for the publication.)

Sample #5

Dear Editor,

I've been a subscriber to your e-zine for five years and while I love it, there has always been something missing and I think I can feel it. I would like to propose a column on (insert column name).

Signed: author's full name

(Editor's note: It's great that this writer is a subscriber and feels he/she can meet a need not being fulfilled, but this isn't the way to get the assignment. How could he/she have successfully pitched a new column idea?)

Sample #6

Dear Editor,

Hi,I came across your site while 'dabbling' in the internet. I also write freelance articvles... do you pay for commissioned articles, if so, would you consider 'foreigners'?

Signed: author's first name

(Editor's note: The first thing an editor will notice about this query is that it's riddled with grammar and spelling errors. That's an instant call for the "delete" button. Aside from the obvious, this writer didn't take the time to read the publication's guidelines or he/she would've known this publication accepts writers from any country. And finally, this query is a complete waste of the editor's time. What article is the writer interested in writing?)

Sample #7

Dear Editor,

I'm a writer from India, do you take writers from India? Anyway, what are your writer's guidelines and how will I get paid?

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: This query is just plain lazy... Has this writer even looked for the publication's writing guidelines? It's also unprofessional of this writer to ask the editor when he's going to get paid before he has been given the assignment.)

Sample #8

Dear Editor,

I'm a stay at home mom who works at home as a consultant for _____. Though I've only been doing this for a few short months, I believe I can offer some solid advice as to how other moms can earn extra money working from home and I'd like to share those thoughts with your readers. I can have the article to you tomorrow, as I've already written the first 1,000 words.

Signed: author's first name

(Editor's note: The first thing the editor is going to ask is, "How can this person possibly know what it takes to earn a living from home when she's just started herself? What experience could she really offer my readers?" Then there's the fact that she's already written the article without knowing which direction the editor wants to take.)

Bad Follow-Ups To Query Letters

After you've written the query letter, you must wait ample time for the editor and/or his/her staff to process the query letter. Once significant time has passed, you can follow up with the editor to see where you stand... but when doing so, please be courteous, polite, and professional.

Below are samples of bad follow-ups. Can you guess why they're bad before you read the editorial note?

Sample #1

Dear Editor,

I have been a subscriber of your e-zine for years and have always had respect for you and your publication, but you lost that respect when you didn't respond to my query letter in a timely manner. It has been two years and I have never received an email stating whether you accepted it or rejected it.

Signed: first name only

(Editor's note: Did this writer really think this note would kick the editor into gear? Did the writer even stop and ask himself if the query letter even arrived? Emails don't always show up in in-boxes and letters do get lost in the mail.)

Sample #2

This was a reply from an author who received a form letter rejection because the editor was no longer taking submissions on the topic of choice.

Dear Editor,

well, why is that?

Signed: no author signature

(Editor's note: Never question an editor's reasons, accept them and move on. This type of response annoys editors and wastes their time. Besides that, this writer didn't even take the time to use proper etiquette or sentence structure in responding—don't be lazy just because it's email.)

Sample #3

Dear Editor,

I won't be able to turn the assignment in. I have not heard back from my resources, and I just don't have the time this week to chase down all of my resources and complete this assignment.

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: This email was received the week before the assignment was due. This shows the writer didn't take his/her writing assignment or the publication seriously. It also means that this writer has been blacklisted and won't receive another assignment from this editor again. Once you've committed to an assignment, you need to complete it—even if that means locating new sources to interview. Also note that the writer used "resources" instead of "sources.")

Sample #4

Dear Editor,

I apologize but I won't be able to complete the writing assignment you gave me. There has been a death in the family.

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: Sadly, because many writers are using this as an excuse to not complete a writing assignment many editors are having a hard time believing this statement, whether it's true or not. In fact, it's becoming the industry equivalent of the "my dog ate my homework" excuse.)

Sample #5

Dear Editor,

I've decided the article I proposed is too much work for the amount of money you're going to pay me so I won't be turning it in. Good luck on finding someone else to write for so little pay.

Signed: author's first and last name

(Editor's note: Never ever say this to an editor! First off, it's just plain rude and unprofessional. Secondly, if you pitched an idea, and you agreed to payment, suck it up! You can negotiate a higher payment on your next assignment.)

A Few Final Thoughts

Writing query letters isn't rocket science. It's just a matter of finding the key selling point for your article, tying it into the publication's audience, and showing the editor—through your writing—that you can write a publishable piece he or she will be proud to include in his or her publication.

Here's the thing about writing...

Ideas are a dime a dozen. You can think about them until you are blue in the face, but if you don't act on them, someone else will. And most likely with the same idea, just a different execution.

If you find you're a procrastinator who never sends out query letters, I'd like to offer a three-step process that may help you turn your dreams of being a published writer into reality...

1. Jot down your ideas.

- The minute an idea pops into your head, find a way to "save it for later". Get a piece of paper and jot it down or turn on your tape recorder and record it.
- Don't just jot down the idea in hopes of returning to it later, either. Write, or record, a rough draft of your query letter. Why do you feel this idea is a viable one, who is the target audience, and where do you plan to go with your article?
- Once your rough draft is done, save it so that you can polish it up when you have more free time.

2. Consider viable markets.

While the idea for your article is fermenting in that brain of yours, ask yourself, "What publications would be interested in this idea?"

Knowing who you're pitching the article to can help you determine the angle of your article, thus help you write a winning query letter!

If you can't think of any markets off the top of your head, you'll have to do a little market research. Look at *Writer's Digest's* *Writer's Market Guide* or do a quick search online for "writers guidelines".

3. Schedule writing time.

Now, if you don't have time this week, or even next week, to send out that query letter, look at your schedule and make an appointment with yourself to sit down and polish that query letter.

The good news is that since you took the time to sit down and actually write that rough draft, you won't have to remember why that idea was important to you or find a way to become as passionate about that topic as you were the day you thought of it. All you have to do is pull it out of your saved files, read it over, tweak it, address it to the right publication and editor, and send it off.

What could be easier?

Editors Aren't The Bad Guys

If, procrastinating has less to do with the actual writing, and more to do with fear of editors, I'm here to tell you that editor's aren't the bad guys. They're not looking for new ways to kill your dream or tell you that you're writing sucks... they're just trying to produce a profitable publication their readers will enjoy.

If you take the time to respect the editor's time by following the publication's guidelines, studying the publication so you know who the real audience is, and understand the publication's writing style, you'll be one step closer to getting that coveted acceptance letter.

Believe In Yourself!

If procrastinating has more to do with the way rejection letters make you feel, I'm here to tell you to suck it up.

Look, I get it... rejection letters can suck the life out of your writing dreams! But they're a huge part of being a writer, so you've got to find a way to deal with them without losing sight of who you are as a writer and what you can accomplish.

And one way to do that is to remember that sometimes, you can have a killer query letter and the perfect article idea and still not get the assignment. And that has absolutely nothing to do with your skills as a writer and everything to do with the fact that:

- your topic has already been covered,
- the editor has already assigned a similar piece to another writer—for an upcoming issue,
- a similar piece is already going to print as the editor types your rejection letter, or
- someone higher up in the publication decided that while the editor loved the piece, he or she didn't.

Testimonies Appreciated

If you enjoyed this e-book and found it useful and full of information, I'd love a testimony!

Your reviews really do matter.

They help future buyers know what to expect—outside of the sales hype. And they help me improve the quality of future editions and new books.

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Alyice Edrich

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Acknowledgments

A SPECIAL THANK YOU!

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I also wanted to take this time to send out a special thank you to everyone who purchased this e-book as well as those who downloaded a copy and sent such heartwarming compliments.

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