

## WHY DO WE PUBLISH?

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A major "character" in Mark Salzman's first autobiography is his father. Sometimes his father paints. But his father hates painting. He likes it when his painting is done. He likes having painted. But the act of painting itself is, in his opinion, a big pain in the backside.

Nobody reading this approaches writing like that, do they? I know I don't. Of all my experiences as an author, whacking those words down onto the paper is the best of the best. Always has been, always will be. Even though I cut most of them. I like creating.

I've quoted Hemingway before. Long periods of thinking, short periods of writing. These days, my thinking takes longer and my periods of writing are getting less frequent, but both still happen, and I still love creating something from nothing.

If it weren't for me, you would never read the words you're reading right now. Nobody else would ever write them. And they contain my thoughts. Through time and space, better than telepathy, you hear what I'm saying.

So, there's one reason to write, isn't it? The biggie, if you ask me. I write what I do because I can't NOT write it. I may be clarifying my thoughts in my own head. But, most certainly, I'm just so moved by those thoughts that I must put them on paper. They're in me and they have to get out, kinda like those critters in the ALIEN movies.

Is this the only reason to write? Because I want to zap my thoughts into your heads? I don't know. But let me change the question. Is this a reason to publish? Why not write your books and stick them in a filing cabinet like Sean Connery did in the film FINDING FORRESTER? Write it, express it, file it away. Why publish it?

In FINDING FORRESTER, the Sean Connery character won the Pulitzer with his first book, saw that every reviewer misunderstood him, and decided they could all get stuffed. This is a work of fiction, but I understand the attitude. I once wrote a true story, where the main character was Michael LaRocca, only to have a critic slam the main character as "unbelievable." Apparently I don't act like real people.

I could never shove all my writing in a filing cabinet, unpublished, and tell the establishment to get stuffed. But yep, there are stupid people in the world, and some of them review books.

I've hit best-seller status for two different e-publishers with three different books. Minor thrills at the time, but there's no way I could call them enough of a reward for what I put into writing. (Especially since both publishers stole my royalties...)

You're an author. You know what I'm talking about. We all but kill ourselves to make our books. And let's be blunt here. Unless you're going to throw Rowling/King/Clancy/Grisham money at me -- and you're NOT -- money isn't sufficient reason to publish.

Publishing isn't just a case of sending it to a publisher, signing a contract, and being done.

Next up is editing, which is a blast. Not at the time, perhaps. Any editor worth a damn will beat you over the head with every bad word choice you ever made. And you made hundreds! But at the end of that gauntlet, you know you are da bomb.

Seeing my cover art is almost always awesome. Yes, I did say "almost." One bad experience among eight. It happens. But if you've worked with a publisher, you know what I mean. You log onto the Internet one morning, not fully conscious, amazed that you poured that first cup of coffee without burning off your naughty bits. You pop open an email and see cover art that almost makes your head explode. You get this big rush, thinking, "Someone understands my writing!" What you don't realize, naive little author, is that some artists don't even read the books they do the art for. But still. The art rocks your world. Feel that. I always enjoy clicking those email attachments and seeing MY book covers.

Then comes marketing. Biggest pain in the... Well, let's just say it makes me want to not publish sometimes. So why publish?

I've entered the EPPIEs three times, and been a finalist three times. The second time one of my books was an EPPIE finalist, I made some wisecrack in an author's egroup about how "finalist" is a synonym for "loser" and was raked over the coals.

Oops!

Maybe I annoyed entrants who weren't finalists. I'd always wondered if they existed...

So let's say I'm not publishing for money or awards. They sing a siren song to new authors which this jaded old bastard quit hearing long ago. So why do I still publish? What are my rewards? Let me mention a few.

A psychologist turned English teacher formed a women's reading group at the university where we once worked together in China. Her concept was women readers, women writers. But the first book the group ever discussed was my very own *RISING FROM THE ASHES*, which is about Mom. My only foray into "women's literature." I couldn't attend the reading group, since I'm a guy, but my wife was there. What I learned about my book is priceless, as is knowing what

those young students discussed because of my writing. Issues of such depth that I'd be proud to inspire any student, in any country, in any language, to tackle them.

I used to work on North Carolina hog farms. I enjoyed the company of some damn fine people at every one of them. Hog farming is hard work. This isn't the backyard family farm, folks, this is 13 people with 98 boars, 3500 sows, and all the babies they can make. One of my toughest coworkers was a lesbian who could break Xena in half, and my one foray into writing horror gave her nightmares.

I don't consider myself a poet, and I believe most of the reading world agrees with me. But I have published 6 poems. There's one that a hog farm coworker insists will be read at his funeral. Don't ask me why he was planning his funeral during our lunch break because I have no idea. But, well, I guess I'm invited, in a manner of speaking.

Master Pizza, 30th Street, Tampa, Florida. A bunch of drunken Italian relatives reading one of my less-than-serious poems ALOUD between pitchers of beer. It was like a Joe Dolce moment.

I was working as a security guard in a particularly unpleasant place. This was 20 years ago, I think. A fellow guard read one of my short stories. It is, by far, the most allegorical thing I've ever written. I can't tell you how many times I've thought about throwing it out. But then, I remember Bob's words. "This is me. This is my life." Me too, old pal, and I don't care if you and I are the only two readers to have any idea what I'm talking about. {Scapegoat Bob!}

I've written some pretty heady volumes, but I've also written quite a few short works. Numerous students in China told me, "This is the first book in English I've ever finished reading." When I write, I certainly never set out to help anyone learn English. (Some of my editors claim I never learned the language.) And, students will LIE to teachers. But I've decided that at least one was telling the truth.

When I left the US, I embarked on several journeys. Learning to live in China. Learning to love. Taking another shot at the writer dream. And, eventually, teaching. After all that, I tried my hand at writing humor for the first time. Every time I hear Jan laugh at something I've written, I file it away as a reason to keep writing.

I've written one play in my life. I was young, and quite hooked on the album (pre-CD days) JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR. So, you guessed it, I tackled JC. I wrote something that nobody can read without having a powerful reaction. Readers love it or they hate it. I'm proud of that. And hey, it's only one act long. I have a short attention span.

I loaned Clint "Two Dawgs" Hill my very first book. My cousin. He took it to Durham (North Carolina) and loaned it to a bunch of hippie buddies. He asked for another, because the first one fell apart from overuse. That's why we publish. People all but fighting for the chance to read my words. And heck, THE CHRONICLES OF A MADMAN wasn't even good yet. It's 25 years older now.

So, maybe this is why we don't just stop when the book is written, stick it in a drawer, and uncork the champagne. Although I do hope you uncorked the champagne. This planet contains far too many people who "want to be authors" but who haven't written a book. Never have, never will. Meanwhile, you and I are sitting here knowing we had no choice. We had to write.

Why publish? Heck, why not?