

*change print*

PRESCRIPTION FOR GETTING PUBLISHED

by Janice Daugharty

After ten years and nineteen novels, I finally got published. March of 1995 marks one year since my first novel, DARK OF THE MOON, came out. Since then, I have published a story collection, GOING THROUGH THE CHANGE, and another novel, NECESSARY LIES. In the spring of 1996, my third novel, PAWPAW PATCH, is scheduled to emerge from its computer cocoon at HarperCollins, along with the paperback reprint of my previous novel. DARK OF THE MOON, likewise, just came out in paperback, and is currently in production as a Hallmark film. Both of my published novels have been sold to one of the most prestigious publishers in Germany.

Why such sudden success for Janice Daugharty? Why was that sudden success so delayed?

My sudden success evolved in part from ~~an obsession with writing and clicking with the right editors.~~ Reading is subjective. As you and I have a personal preference for certain genres and styles, so do editors. But often, even if an editor loves your writing, he or she lacks sufficient power to push a work through the house, to get that majority vote required to see a book through to publication.

*clicking with those people in high places - ed. as well as an obsession with writing*

The same is true of agents: you have to click with the right one. But having an agent doesn't guarantee your work will sell. I've had two agents, who in turn, sent out my work during what I call my apprenticeship period to all the big and little houses and got back praiseworthy rejections, but no sell. I fell in love with my rejection letters, at a particular point, after finally resigning myself to being a mere housewife and hobby writer. I had to write better, I thought. I wasn't getting published till I could write as well as the great authors I was reading like the daily news. The best thing that ever happened to me was getting rejected, because I was growing as a writer--writing more, writing better, writing till my eyes smarted from staring at my computer screen.

The second best thing to happen was getting a story published in ONTARIO REVIEW, a literary journal edited by Ray Smith and Joyce Carol Oates. By the time I sent them a story, in 1992, I had despaired of getting my novels published; I just hoped to justify my writing habit by publishing a short story. Free was fine, at that point. But Smith and Oates paid. Great! And they asked me to send a story collection for their consideration. Quickly following that sale, came the sale of my first novel. And the other sales came so swiftly that I can't imagine now ever having anguished over getting published. I should have known that if I simply hung in there--writing and reading--I couldn't fail.

Instinctively, during my apprenticeship phase, I was writing strong stories with strong characters and plots, but I hadn't yet learned to write with concrete language and unique details--what is part of me and my experience, rather than what I've read. I was lazy

about language, opting for abstracts and easy cover words, and phrases that had been tested in all the pulp fiction I'd read.

*Wishing*  
Trying to empty his mind of book-appropriate language, perhaps,

William Faulkner once said that he would have been better off never to have read. But reading literature nourishes a writer. Reading good writing edifies. Reading speaks to the soul <sup>of writers</sup> through mutual love of language.

When I was thirty-eight years old, I started to Valdosta State

University--a small college then--in Valdosta, Georgia. ~~I got~~

~~married when I was nineteen years old, raised two daughters and a son,~~

~~on our remote South Georgia farm, and found myself with an itch~~

~~couldn't scratch after I became disenchanted with shopping and going~~

~~out to lunch. Having no great ambitions as a student,~~ <sup>at the onset,</sup> I drifted into

~~literature courses--not all that interested at first.~~ <sup>skimming concepts & ideas</sup> In an English

grammar and composition class, one of my professors remarked on my

talent in an essay I'd written. But that wasn't my starting place,

that wasn't when I found out I was a writer. That came later, during

a course on Southern Lit, while reading the works of William

Faulkner. Rural Mississippi and Southern Georgia had much in common;

the people I'd grown up with in Echols County, the smallest county in

Georgia, were every bit as rich, my place was just as rich. I

started writing. 2

Unlike most writers, I jumped right into the novel, rather than wade into writing through short stories. My first novel was a predictable, sentimental story of a black woman, based on someone I'd known. Badly written, sloppy, but completed. Problem: I hadn't read enough good writing then, had attended only one creative writing

*Wish*  
*county-line*  
*in SE GA*  
*leave hurts to*  
*a longing I couldn't name*  
*looking those children into*  
*teenage residence*  
*in*  
*bad in my life*  
*writes literature just happened to me.*

class, and was yet to become disciplined or serious enough to stay put and worry out magic sentences. I started reading, really reading, not for content so much as syntax and style. All this time I was writing--one, two, three, four, five novels. Finally on the fifth one, I nabbed my first NY agent. She began sending out TWO SHADES OF MORNING, and though editors <sup>voiced</sup> ~~expressed~~ interest and commented on my talent, none were taking. One thing going in my favor was that I kept writing, going on to other projects, like switching lures when the one you're using fails to catch a fish. What was not in my favor was believing I'd finished a project--I had a whole story, didn't I?--before it was polished. I didn't know how to write; I didn't know how to edit. I hadn't found my voice or <sup>hacked</sup> ~~carved~~ out a style. Regardless, before long, I had boxes of manuscripts--some bad, some good, but again all whole stories. Then my first agent, Nancy Hogan, left agenting to become an editor and passed me along to her friend, Susan Ramer. And Susan began sending out the same story, my fifth novel, and sorting through what I'd written before and after TWO SHADES OF MORNING. Nothing else quick and sharp enough to interest an editor among the numerous stories I was still cranking out on my reel-ribbon typewriter.

But I was hooked. As surely as a <sup>drug</sup> ~~drug~~ addict is hooked. Between novels, I would write short stories, sending them out to various lit reviews, whose editors in turn sent them back with form rejection letters. <sup>Hard with notes, postscripts, usually ~~concocted~~ a dressing down for faint print) - I was re-inking the spool-ribbon on my type writer - or ~~over~~ insufficient postage.</sup>  
By 1992, when I wrote DARK OF THE MOON, I had developed into a writer--one who would write regardless, and write well. I was writing truth without a thought to agent or editor or reader approval of that truth. But I was emotionally maimed by that mixed blessing

of rejection, which had strengthened my writing but had wrung me of hope. Also, my husband's heavy construction business had taken a bad turn; I needed to go to work. But he insisted that I keep writing-- editors were still responding to my stories with rejections that began with a pat on the head and ended with a kick lower down on the anatomy. But my agent loved DARK OF THE MOON--finally she approved of something new I'd written. I was happy enough, if not quite euphoric.

Meantime, I made that crucial connection with ONTARIO REVIEW. I had taken a part-time job at a public library, to break my writing habit as much as anything, and discovered that working was such a distraction I could hardly write. But after Oates asked for the collection, I started writing at night. So sure that this was my big break.

It was.

Within a couple of months, following approximately fifty rejections on DARK OF THE MOON, my agent placed it with Baskerville, a small publisher in Texas. Now I was elated, now I could write! But not quite free of financial worries--my advances were too meager-- not quite ready to give up my State Merit Insurance, which I'd begun to think of as savior after an expensive, emergency surgery. Then a friend of Oates, Greg Johnson, a writer based in Atlanta, introduced an editor at HarperCollins to my stories in ONTARIO REVIEW. Larry Ashmead asked for a novel right away; but being under contract with Baskerville, I had to wait until they either accepted or rejected my next novel, which was a total make-over of a story I'd written in 1989. Baskerville rejected the novel, and I sent it to HarperCollins. Within a week or two, the editor at HarperCollins,

Larry Ashmead, made an offer on NECESSARY LIES, hardcover and paperback, and a short while later, bought reprint rights of DARK OF THE MOON.

Because novels sell better and get more recognition, DARK OF THE MOON, hardcover, was published before GOING THROUGH THE CHANGE. Sales proved to be scanty on the novel--it received only a few reviews--because I was a new writer, but subsidiary sales compensated for it's lack of commercial success. Then six months later, when my story collection appeared, John Domini wrote a glorious surprise review of both books for the New York Times Book Review. My favorite paper had reviewed ~~my~~ books! The kind of review that a writer can only dream about:--"Janice Daugharty is a writer who thinks big..." "Sensuous, swift, full of sparkling twists, [Janice Daugharty's] is a voice so rich that a single page can be thrilling." I memorized the full-length review, can quote it now without tripping over a single ~~negative~~ <sup>early</sup> word. Within the next two weeks, following that review, Signboard Hill (the Hallmark people) made an offer on the film rights (a sell-out!) for DARK OF THE MOON.

In spite of my stash of twenty-three novels now, I'm still writing, hoping for a masterpiece. I write full-time, with time out only to promote my books--three published within a year. I'm still reading and writing and loving it--a sure prescription for success if ever there was one--and making a name for myself. Often interviewers suggest it is my talent that brought me such "sudden" success. Maybe. But I tend to believe that most writers have some degree of talent; whether or not they develop it is another matter. Whether or not they hang in there is the key.