

Q&A For Student Projects

Good luck with your project or paper. May the Force be with you :) Here's hoping you get an A+.

Common Personal Questions About Sherrilyn Kenyon & Her Work

Q: Is writing the only job you have, or do you have another job with it?

At present, I'm very lucky to be a full time writer. However, throughout most of my career, I had to work as many as three jobs to make ends meet, and to pay back my college student loans. I was even homeless after I'd published six bestselling books (and I lived very frugally before that, but things happen beyond our control). Remember that neither success nor failure is ever final.

Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of working at home?

I get to work in my pajamas :) The disadvantage is that if it's a particularly busy or stressful day, I'm in my pajamas at dinnertime which can get embarrassing when someone unexpected comes to the door.

Seriously though, the biggest advantage is working at home. But like the PJ's above, it's also a disadvantage since people tend to think those who work at home aren't really working, and that you can stop your workday to have lunch or do other things. You can't. You have to stay focused. Working from home with any job isn't something you can do if you're easily distracted or not self-motivated.

Q: Do your books have a message?

Yes, they do. As a child with a bad home life, books were what saved my sanity, and I want to pay that forward. It was through books that I learned a bad past didn't have to define my future. That if I worked hard enough, believed enough... if I kept trying, no matter what, that things could and would get better. That's what I want to convey in my books. There are no guarantees in life, but you can't let that stop you from trying.

I truly believe that the strongest steel is forged in the hottest flames. That those things that don't destroy us, make us stronger and teach us vital lessons. We will all have enemies out to destroy us. We will all have demons that haunt us, and secrets we try to keep. No one comes out of life without soul-deep scars. But we don't have to let that destroy us. We don't have to let those scars and enemies take our hearts and souls. We can triumph through any and all adversity. Don't let anyone, not even the experts, stop you from being the best human being you can be.

Most of all, I hope the books show that you can find humor and hope in even the worst situation.

Q: How would you describe your writing style?

Funny and dark. I grew up watching a lot of MASH reruns. How they could laugh during the tragedy and horror that surrounded them, fascinated me. Life is fun, hilarious and tragic. Sometimes all at once. Ironically, it was that combination in my books that made it so hard for me to get published. Used to be, publishers wanted books that were one dimensional. A comedy couldn't have a dark hero or a sad scene or tragic past. Likewise, a dark story couldn't have humor. They didn't know what to do with me.

That humor, the sarcasm and those dark elements are what fans often tell me they love most about the books. To them, it's what make the characters and stories seem real.

Q: Can you describe a typical day in the life of Sherrilyn Kenyon?

Let's see... I spring out of bed every day at 5 AM to put on my designer jumpsuit and jog for sixteen miles, then I come home to my fabulous mansion and swim in my indoor pool for three miles while Arturo, my personal trainer, urges me on for at least three extra laps. Then the two of us sit down in my marble sunroom to eat Cajun hashbrowns at 8 AM while I dictate my novel to my personal secretary, and my husband watches on encouragingly....

Wait, you mean what do I *really* do? Oh...

Well... let's go back to Arturo... He's great. He's... oh, you want honesty.

Yeah, but Arturo...

Well yeah, he's only alive in my head, and my idea of a designer suit is what I got off the sale rack at Target, but still...

Okay, okay. We'll start over. I'll be honest this time and leave the fantasy people in my head. Drat!

I stagger out of bed (I'm really not a morning person in any sense of the term) anywhere from 6-9 AM and do my mummyesque walk through the kitchen to search out my water and apple juice from the fridge. I usually glare at the clock and wonder why I'm up after only three or four hours of sleep, and why Arturo abandoned me for Felicia- the hot super model who wouldn't know quality sock monkey pajamas if they bit her. How could he leave me like that for that beautiful, skinny... oh, never mind. I get it.

Then I'm usually greeted by at least one child speaking to me in a language I can't understand (I think it's English but at 6 AM it's all gibberish to me). I mumble something back at him, hoping I didn't just promise him a Ferrari when he's sixteen (if I did, I'll have to sell one of his brothers on eBay to pay for it), and stumble my way to the table where I'm met with the whole crew of perky morning people. I try to smile and hope it's not a grimace that will scar them for life, and mumble a good day to them as their father rushes them off to school.

Ahhh! Now it's just me and my cats who don't care if I'm a morning person or not, or the fact that I have a hairdo the Bride of Frankenstein would envy. They really appreciate

the sock monkey PJ's I like to wear. Actually, all they want is their bowl filled with food (dang those opposable thumbs), and they will talk to me until I give in. Which doesn't take long since they have the loudest meows on the planet and I can't stand noise before noon. I pour some food, then debate on whether or not I should clean up the mess I just made with the cat food, or suffer my poor hubby's indignation over it. Deciding that it's worth listening to hubby's indignation, because I'll only make a bigger mess trying to clean up the little mess, I leave said mess and stumble off to my office with the cats following me. Why don't they ever eat after I pour food for them? I think it's Passive Aggressiveness.

Then again, it's 6 AM, who cares about cat psychology?

I flop into my chair and wiggle my mouse. Then I stare at my screen for awhile which has a Sephiroth drawing for my background. I don't know what it is about Final Fantasy, but...

Once my eyes begin to open, I try to focus so that I can answer my bazillion emails that came in overnight- editors don't sleep anymore than I do- and do a little webwork even though I know I should be writing. I don't feel like writing. My brain is still oatmeal.

Oops, hubby is home from dropping off kids and has found cat food mess.

Quickly open WordPerfect, pretend to work so that he won't want to interrupt my (clears throat for sarcasm) brilliance with his indignant tirade. Farce doesn't work, he fusses anyway. Try logic. Explain to hubby that I'd only make a bigger mess, and then he'd have more clean up to do. Besides the cats will eventually eat it all up anyway, so why are you mad, honey? (Evil cats for not eating it BEFORE he came home—I will hide catnip for this). He rolls his eyes, reminds me the Grand Queen Cats would never eat off the floor, then leaves me alone to glare at the Grand Queen Cats who totally ignore me because they couldn't care less. We are here to serve their furry hides.

Crisis averted, I then seek to work. Phone rings, and rings, and rings, and rings until I want to flush it down the toilet. Play music loud. Hubby complains. Neighbors complain. Put on headphones and try to write only to learn I have missed an important call from editor. Oops. Return call, and play phone tag for a few hours while trying to work.

Have a hero who won't cooperate. I kill him off. Then realize the book just ended three hundred pages short. Drat. Erase and bring him back to life, then I just beat him up real bad for not cooperating. He still doesn't cooperate. Thinks he's Rambo. Put him in a dress and threaten to make him a Rambina unless he cooperates. That works. He's back again.

Write until the kids come home and then listen to them lament the fact that they have to go to school. Why can't they be adults and do whatever they want? Remind them that I want to be on a beach in Antigua (watching Arturo, but we omit this since Dad is standing with them), but instead spent the whole day staring at words that turned against me and tried to steal my sanity. Tell them I'd rather be at school, daydreaming and playing with friends while my parents pay all my bills. They stick out their tongues and go upstairs to play while I go back to work. Yeah, grownups have it made.

Angry UPS and Fed Ex drivers appear and drop ninety boxes on my lawn. Please note, I am a writer and we're prone to exaggeration. But not this time. Am thinking I need to move to a new house to make room for giveaway stuff. At the very least, move so that the angry drivers can't find me and hurt me.

Call for my wonderful hubby who mumbles he'd rather clean up the spilled cat food. We wrangle the boxes in and find a place to stash them. Then I'm back to work until dinner time. Make superb meal (okay it's Chef Boyardee and crackers with lettuce and Ranch dressing masquerading as salad) that the kids pick at, while they pick on each other. Dream of eating a nine course meal on the beach with hubby, and no screaming children or cat making a hairball on rug. Make deal with hubby, I clean the table while he takes care of hairball. Run children away from table by announcing homework time.

Climb stairs while lamenting the fact I no longer have a ranch style house, to get kids back to the table to actually do homework. Wonder what kids do at school all day to have so much homework. Egads! It appears all work is saved for home. Finally get that done, and wrestle the game controllers out of their little hands so that I can wrestle them into bed (am thinking wrestling greased pigs would be easier). Send hubby off to watch TV and head back to office, where I write until I'm too tired to stay awake. Usually until two or three in the morning.

That is basically a typical day that is often interrupted by trips to the emergency room, such as the time my youngest thought he could climb the walls, or the time I severely burned my hand when he reached for a hot skillet-- and a thousand other unforeseen things that crop up. But basically, that's it.

Q: You've been writing since the age of seven—literally. How do you keep your stories fresh?

I air them out every day at three. Oh, sorry. This is a serious question. Hmm... I'm not sure. The stories are just always there and I know I have more ideas than I will ever have a chance to write. I think that's what keeps me going. I want to put down as many on paper as I can before I expire.

Q: Since you have so many books you write in a year and worlds you've created, how do you keep up with your plots and characters? Do you write it down or use sticky notes?

Almost all of it is kept in my head. I think that's why I can't remember where my keys are. They're usually found in the fridge, or a shoe, or somewhere else they don't belong.

Sometimes though, I will write a few things down in a notebook I keep with me. It can be a random piece of dialogue I thought of. Or a plot point I know I won't use in my current book that I'll need two or three books down the line.

Q: What is your greatest challenge as an author when you begin work on a new book?

There's not really a challenge. I always say that I finish a book so that I can start the next one. Really.

Q: What is it about the paranormal that you love?

Blood, guts, goats, ghosts, zombies, vampires, shapeshifters... Everything. I've never been the kind of person who liked to color inside the lines or who wanted to play by other people's rules. With the paranormal and science fiction and fantasy, the only limitation I have is my imagination. I can do anything and go any place (as long as it makes sense and follows the rules of the worlds I've set up). I love the freedom of it all.

Q: You also write Scottish historicals as Kinley MacGregor as well as Science Fiction and Fantasy. Is it difficult to shift from one genre to another?

Not at all. I just close my eyes, and poof, I'm there on the Highland banks, feeling the wind tugging at my hair, or flying through space. Of course, I'm often looking behind me for a demon to pop in, but that's another story.

Q: Which *Dark-Hunter* or *Chronicles of Nick* character is most near and dear to your heart, and why?

Acheron... no wait, Simi. No, Talon. Bubba. Zarek. Nick. Kyrian, um... well, all of them. Choosing between them would be like choosing between my children. They all hold my heart, and they all make me crazy.

Q: Which character from your various worlds was the most fun to create?

Probably Simi because I think we all have some Simi in us. She is truly the best and worst of humanity which is weird when you consider the fact that she's a demon.

Q: Where did you get the idea to combine mythological gods with vampire lore?

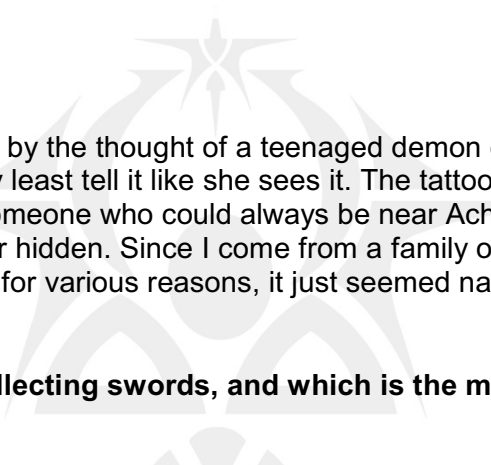
It was just one of those serendipitous moments. I was working for a small science fiction magazine, taking a class in Greek mythology, and working on an article for the school paper about the origins of Halloween. That afternoon my boss at the magazine asked me to write an ongoing serial to help boost our subscription rate. I asked if I could do vampires and he said so long as I thought people would read them, sure.

A few hours later, I was talking to my professor for the article I was writing, and told him that all of my research on vampirism and shapeshifters kept going back to Ancient Greece for the oldest tales. Since Apollo was god of the sun and plagues, I asked him why he thought no one had ever used that as the backbone of their fictitious world. The moment the words were out of my mouth, I realized *I* should write that tale.

I went back to my dorm and the Dark-Hunter legends were born.

Q: Simi, a Charonte demon, is a living, breathing tattoo whose symbiotic relationship with Ash is wildly imaginative, insanely genius and very curious. How did you think up her character?

Have you ever been on a long car trip with someone you thought was a good friend? A car trip that was supposed to be only eight hours, and after ten you wanted to BBQ that person? That was what led to Simi. I conjured a BBQ sauce-loving demon who unfortunately didn't eat the driver. But I knew she would be the perfect companion for



Ash. I was enchanted by the thought of a teenaged demon companion who would tell it like it is, or at the very least tell it like she sees it. The tattoo part came from the fact that it would have to be someone who could always be near Acheron, seen but not seen. Ever present and ever hidden. Since I come from a family of tattooed men who have to cover up their tattoos for various reasons, it just seemed natural that she would be a living tattoo.

Q: How did you get into collecting swords, and which is the most prized in your collection?

It all started with an inlaid ivory hilt Korean sword my father owned that I discovered when I was five. I thought it was the coolest thing, and quickly sliced a chunk of my finger. I've respected and loved them ever since. There is a beauty and artistry to each one, and the workmanship that goes into each is incredible. I think that appreciation comes from my grandfather who was a blacksmith. As a little girl I used to watch my grandfather work in a forge. I'm fascinated by metallurgy.

My most prized is probably my cheapest. It's a replica of a twelfth century battle sword that I used to fight with back when I was active in the Society for Creative Anachronism, for no other reason that it was my first. I have two that were given to me by fans that I also treasure.

Q: What can you tell me about yourself that I'd never guess from your books?

I collect hourglasses. Another strange fascination that started in childhood. And that I love classical music and anime. I'm also a gamer. And I play the flute almost every day, and one of the goals I have in my life is to be able to play Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King*. I'm partially paralyzed in my right hand, and lack the dexterity to play that, and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. If I could just play one of those tunes just once... But it doesn't stop me from trying, and one day... I will play them perfectly. I know it.

The other thing is that I come from a long line of working people. My mother was sixty years old, working the counter of a video store, and my father was a retired Sergeant Major. My grandmother worked the assembly line of Nabisco, and my other grandfather was a faith-healer and rainmaker who built the church where I was baptized. When I was little, I used to pretend I could control the weather too.

Q: Can you tell me about your childhood?

It was brutal and awful, and it left a lot of scars on me. It was the kind of childhood that a lot of people use to justify criminal behavior. But that being said, it gave me a lot of strength and made me the person I am today. That which doesn't kill you, serves as a motivational speech for others. You can't let the past ruin your present or destroy your future. I couldn't control what happened then, but I can control my attitude now, and I won't give them anymore of my life. To anyone else who is in a similar situation, hold on. It will get better. You have to have faith, and you have to believe in yourself.

Q: Did you always want to be a writer?

From the moment I was born. Literally. In my Brownie manual it has my shaky handwriting that says: When I Grow Up, I Want To Be: A writer and a mother.

Q: What inspired you to be a writer?

The characters who live in my heart and head. They won't let me sleep until I tell their tale. It was also how I dealt with the evils of my childhood. I couldn't strike back at the ones who hurt me in real life. But I could in fiction.

Q: Where do you get your ideas?

Everywhere. They fall out of the sky. Really. I was on a shuttle with my crew, coming back from Comic Con New York. Exhausted, I was trying to grab a catnap, and pay attention to nothing. All of a sudden... BAM! I had Thorn in my head, and I knew everything about him. His past, his present, and I had the entire book I want to write about him.

Bubba was born during a conversation with a friend who said she wanted a computer tech guy she could understand. Someone who spoke slowly and didn't use weird tech words... BAM! Bubba Burdette was there with the Triple B.

Q: How do you stay motivated and inspired?

The characters. They are always with me, and I want to hear them more clearly. Nothing motivates me more than wanting to know how the story ends, wanting to learn more about the people in my head and heart.

Q: Is there anyone you look up to for inspiration?

I wouldn't say inspiration so much as motivation and strength. As hard as my life has been, my mother's was so much harder. To this day, I don't know how she got up in the morning and made it through the days of her life. She had a severely handicapped daughter, and she lost her oldest son (my brother). I barely survived my brother's death. I have no idea how she managed to hold it together. She would always say that she had a small child and my sister- she had no choice but to continue on. I figure as long as I have my sons and they're healthy, I have no reason whatsoever to complain about anything.

Q: What books have you written?

Bunches. I've placed over fifty on the *New York Times*, and I add new ones all the time. The best way to get a list is to visit the website and click the printable book list.

Q: Are you going to write more books in future?

Absolutely. I've been writing all my life, and often joke with my hubby that when I die, I want him to bury me with a laptop that has a long battery life. That way, I can be a real

ghostwriter.

Q: Have you won any awards?

Quite a few. I've won several Prisms, PEARLS, HOLT Medallion, Maggie Award, MARA Award, Bestselling Book Of The Year, Reader's Choice, and many others.

Q: What is the most important reason for you to keep writing?

My love of it. I live to write. It's like breathing to me. Not to mention, I think my fans might eat me for breakfast if I were to quit before I wrote Savitar's or Jaden's story.

Q: What is the first thing you ever wrote?

A horror novel about a little girl who murdered her brothers and got away with it. I swear it wasn't based on any fantasy I had at the time. Really. (And Steven, if you see this, I *really* mean it)

Q: Do you have any siblings?

Bunches. I have two older sisters, and a younger brother. I had an older brother who died when I was twenty-one. We also inherited my uncle's sons and daughter who lived with us off and on throughout most of my childhood and early adulthood.

I tried several times as a child to give them away. I even went so far as to swap my baby brother for a wagon when he was eighteen months old. Unfortunately, my mother made me swap back. Of course, when he turned sixteen, she told me that she'd wished we kept the wagon.

Q: Do you feel like your work has had a positive influence on readers?

That's for the reader to judge. I hope I can say yes. That's all I truly want. Books gave me so much all throughout my life. They gave me hope when I needed it. Laughter. Most of all, they provided an escape from that which I couldn't face. I can't thank those writers enough for being there when I needed them. That's what I hope other readers take from my books. I want to touch their emotions and give them a warm feeling when they put one of my books down or think about one of my characters.

Q: Do you have any charities you support, or other humanitarian programs you participate in?

I support numerous charities. My oldest son has autism, so I've done a lot of work with autism charities, and for them. Likewise, I support Cerebral Palsy, Diabetes and Cancer by participating in auctions for those causes every year.

These are the organizations that I personally favor and support: American Cancer Society, Autism Research Institute, Autism Society of America, Cure Autism Now, United Cerebral Palsy, American Red Cross, NOLA Public Library, St. Jude's, Make a Wish, National Center for Learning Disabilities, March of Dimes, and Habitat for Humanity. I'm also a big supporter of the arts in my town and am a member of: Friends

of Nashville Ballet, Nashville Opera Guild and the Applause Society. And as a woman of mixed Cherokee heritage, I'm also a member of the Native American Indian Association of Tennessee.

My writing memberships include: Science Fiction Writers of America, Horror Writers Association, Mystery Writers of America, Sisters in Crime, RWA, MCRW, Novelists Inc., and the Author's Guild.

Q: Did you have to overcome hardships to get your books published?

I always say there are two things you never want to ask me about: Publishing and pregnancy. I'll scare you off both. Yes, I had an extremely hard time.

I finished my first novel when I was seven and I published it myself ;) Yes, I still have it. It was a horror novel about a little girl who killed off her brothers and it was even illustrated. I published my first essay in third grade in a local paper, and made my first official sale at age fourteen. I wrote all through school (hey, it was the best way to daydream and be left alone--all the teachers thought I was taking diligent notes).

At 20, I'd decided that I was going to finally write a novel and submit it. Don't get me wrong, I'd written dozens of novels by that point, and I do mean dozens. But I was an editor so I knew they reeked. I spent what little free time I had writing the draft. During Christmas break, between my jobs, I diligently typed those pages on a typewriter that I'd borrowed from my older brother's roommate.

I will never forget when my brother, who as a teenager with a driver's license, had spent his entire summer teaching a six year old how to read, came to get the typewriter. "I know it's going to be a winner, baby. I can't wait to see it in print."

He died a few days later. Out of everything that had happened to me in my life, that was the hardest blow. He'd been my only light in many a bleak darkness. Needless to say, I trunks that book. I couldn't stand to look at it. I chucked all of my writing. I crawled inside myself, and to this day, a part of me died with him.

But fate wasn't through with me. My husband, who had been my boyfriend before my brother died, returned to my life with a vengeance. I always three people saved my life and kept me sane.

My brother who will always be my hero. My best friend, Kim, who gave me a copy of Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower* when we were thirteen. A book that gave me hope and showed me that a bad past didn't have to define the rest of my life. God bless romance, and Kathleen Woodiwiss. I shudder to think where I'd have ended up had Kim not introduced me to a genre that finally empowered me. That showed me I didn't have to be a victim, and that I could defy all odds. That even I could be loved by someone who would cherish me for who I was. Happy endings are possible even for those of us who don't really believe in them.

And the last, is my husband who showed me that heroes aren't just on paper. Real men are out there, and they will stand by you and hold your hand through the worst things imaginable. And believe me, that poor man has been tested.

When I was moving in with him, he found my old notebooks with the manuscripts I'd written for years. He looked up at me and said, "I remember before we broke up that you were always writing something and plotting a new book or story. Why don't you do that anymore?"

I couldn't tell him then that after my brother's death, I didn't believe in dreams anymore and that I honestly expected him to abandon me at any moment like everyone else in my life had done, or turn into a ferocious monster who abused and belittled me.

But that darn fate was still there and she wasn't through with me.

Anyway, like most newlyweds, we struggled hard that first year, and honestly many years after. But that first year, I couldn't find a job even at McDonald's. I've never felt more worthless, which given my past is saying something.

In my darkest hour, my best friend who happened to be an editor for a magazine, did the most incredible thing of all. She offered me work. "Now I know you haven't written in awhile, but if you're willing to do it..."

Oh my God, are you serious? I can get paid and not take off my clothes? I'm so there.

I hung up and went to the closet where my husband kept his old typewriter. Then I sat down on the floor— we had no furniture in our apartment at that time— and the moment my fingers touched those keys the most amazing thing happened. Every character. Every voice I'd silenced on that cold winter night when my brother had died, came back with a screaming clarity. I had no choice but to write.

When my husband came home that night, he was horrified and I don't blame him. He'd gone to work with a normal wife and come home to a stark raving lunatic. I was still sitting on the floor with tears streaming down my face, and crumpled up pieces of paper all over.

"Um honey, are you okay?"

"Yes! I'm writing!"

In that moment, he saw his future and his nightmare. My husband has Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. So to keep from killing me over the paper mess on the floor, he, who has never believed in using credit for anything, took me out that night and charged a word processor, rickety card table, and a ten dollar steno chair that he set up in the living room of our two room apartment. It was there I wrote my first ten novels.

Contrary to what I wanted, they didn't sell right away. But I was finally going in the right direction again.

And I did what most writers have done. I entered contests, and waited patiently by the phone, hoping some publisher somewhere would take pity on me.

Those were long, hard years. I always say that it's easy to write a book when you have a contract. The hardest thing in the world is to write one when you don't know if it'll ever

sell. At first, everyone's excited for you. You're writing a book- woohoo, and then as time goes on and you don't become Nicolas Sparks overnight, that support dries up. In fact, one of the last things my father said to me before he died, was that I should spend the money I was wasting on writing to buy lottery tickets. At least with lottery I'd win once in awhile.

But then, the miracle happened. On Feb 3rd, 1992, I got the call that every writer dreams about. Well okay, even that was backward. I've never done anything the way I was supposed to. Instead of the editor calling me, I called her to interview her for another magazine I was working for. She mentioned my manuscript, and I quickly assured her. "I'm not calling about that." I was terrified that she'd think I was harassing her.

"Oh, well I was going to call you later today about it. I want to buy it."

I was stunned. Ironically that was the same book I'd typed on that Christmas break that my brother had been so sure would sell. And in the next year, I went on to sell a total of six books. When they came out, they hit bestseller lists, and at my first signing, I sold through all of my books in under 45 minutes. They went so fast that the writer sitting next to me kept gaping and asking if I was someone famous. "Who are you?"

Like most writers would, I thought I had a career.

But keep in mind that neither success nor failure is ever final. As quickly as it came to me, it left. And that was hard. Harder still was the fact that most of my writing friends abandoned me, too, as if they were afraid that what I had was contagious and they might catch it if they stood too close.

And when it rains, it pours. I've noticed that whenever a writer has trouble in their career, they have it in their personal life, too. I was no exception. My father died just after my first book came out. My mother was diagnosed with the same cancer that had killed him. My son was born prematurely a few weeks later. I was told twice to pick out funeral clothes for my baby. And I remember standing in the NICU, telling God He could take anything from me. My career, my house, my car, just don't take my baby.

It was a bargain He accepted.

Because of the medical bills, and the fact I'd lost my job due to the days I'd missed with him, we lost everything. I *was* homeless with an infant who had horrifying medical problems. While my husband was at work with our one and only car, my son and I would stay in the hospital waiting room, just in case, and because it was the one place you could stay for hours on end and no one thought anything about it.

When we were lucky enough to have a roof over our heads again, it was a roach infested apartment next door to drug dealers. I could not write this stuff. I wouldn't do this to my worst villain. We'd sold everything we had, except my 286 DOS computer with a whopping 24 MB hard drive that used a 5.5 inch floppy- this was 1997- I had that as my computer until 1999. The only reason we still had it was that no one would give us anything for it. We didn't have cable TV. No internet. No phone. We couldn't afford it.

Nietzsche said that hope is the worst of all evils, for it prolongs the torment of man. At times, he's right. And I was running out of hope. By 1998, it'd been over 4 years since I last sold a book. I'd tried every genre and every story I could think of. If a new line opened, buddy, I was there for it.

Desperate, I sat down and wrote the most marketable book of that time. A regency-set historical romance. How could I lose? My critique partners at that time were NYT bestselling Regency historical authors. It had every element that had made numerous authors famous. My critique partners loved it. My agent thought it was one of the best books she'd ever read and she eagerly sent it out.

Then one by one, the rejections rolled in again. Until the day my agent sent the worst one of all. And if any of you ever get a worse one, dinner's on me. That rejection? "No one at this publishing house will ever be interested in developing this author. Do not submit her work to us again."

Yeah. It devastated me. But you know what? I am grateful to this day for that editor and for those words. 'Cause I am Southern, y'all. The best way to fire me up is to try and kick me down. As my uncle Carlos so often said. We are Cherokee and we don't run. Sometimes we want to. Sometimes we ought to. But we don't run.

I decided right then and there that I would rather be a first-rate version of myself than a second-rate version of somebody else. If I was going to fail at this, I would do it on **my** terms and I'd do it writing the books **I** wanted to write. I have never since that day chased a marketing a trend and I never will.

So after I unpacked the 286 computer I'd packed up in the box and swore I'd never touch again, I started writing the book I wanted to write for the first time in years. Now I knew that thing wasn't marketable. It was a pirate book set in 1791, and this is long before *Pirates of the Carribbean*. I sent it to my critique partners who read me the riot act and I don't blame them. They were right. No publisher had bought a pirate novel in years and even when they did none had been set in 1791. Was I out of my mind?

Well, of course I was. I'm a writer.

But insanity has never stopped me before. I sent it on to my agent who promptly reiterated everything they'd said and that I knew. More than that, she told me that we'd had a good run but that it was time to go our separate ways. I don't blame her. She was a great agent and she'd stood by me longer than most.

But without her, I had no way to submit. I couldn't afford to. Plus, my supportive hubby had become burned out after almost a decade of a fizzled career. And he had every right. I'd wasted a lot of money chasing a dream that kept eluding me at best and at worst, kicking me in my teeth. How could I take another cent from my family for this stupid dream?

I was through.

Until one fateful day when I pulled the RWR out of my mailbox. In it was a market update with a name I knew. Laura Cifelli had been added to the HarperCollins staff and

was looking for submissions. My heart started pounding. I knew Laura. She'd been an editor at Dell, and for two years had tried to buy one of my books but couldn't sell the unusual Dark-Hunter idea to marketing.

But I'd promised my hubby that I wouldn't waste anymore money. I debated and agonized and finally decided that I would give it one more shot and one more only. If Laura said no, I'd never, ever try again. So I sat down and wrote the most pathetic query letter you've ever seen. It actually started with, "You probably don't remember me." Laura had been my agent years back when I'd been selling and I was her first client. But I had no ego. I still don't.

In that query, I pitched her two novels. The pirate book everyone had told me would never sell and the one she'd held on to for so long about a Greek general who'd been cursed into a book that I'd written in 1994 as an option book for *Daemon's Angel*.

I'll be honest, I actually stole a single stamp out of my husband's wallet. I didn't dare take two because I knew with his OCD, he'd know they were missing and he'd know exactly what I'd done with them. Not to mention, if it was a rejection, I didn't want to see it. I didn't think I could take another one.

Three days later, I was changing my baby's diaper when my neighbor came running over. "There's a call for you on my phone and it's someone in New York."

I think I had a small stroke as I handed my baby to June and ran to catch it. It was Laura. Since the paranormal market was completely dead and Laura knew Julian's book was tied to a vampire series- something no one would touch back then, she passed on Julian's story. But she wanted to see the pirate book. I was too afraid to even hope. Not to mention, I didn't have the money to submit a partial.

But June was kind enough to offer to loan me the three dollars I needed. I worked on it all night long, after my hubby went to bed, and sent it off the next day with a lump in my throat.

Laura called back to offer me a three book contract. To this day, I'd throw myself under a bus for her. And that book with that pirate that I was told wouldn't sell. Is still, thirteen years later, in print. For one twenty nine cent stamp, my entire life was forever changed. Sometimes our lives are defined not by the big decisions we make, but by the small chances we take.

And for the record, my husband forgave me for raiding his stamp, and I did pay June back.

Laura did so much for me. She helped me to get a great agent who did an awesome job, but who didn't want to handle the paranormal stuff. For one thing, she'd never handled it before, and for another, it still wasn't selling. No one, other than Anne Rice, had hit a list with a vampire novel in over twenty years. She asked me why I wanted to write the same stuff I'd been writing when my career tanked.

But I believed in those Dark-Hunter books. And I finally wore my agent down after much begging. She began submitting them and again, over and over, rejection from every

corner. Until Jennifer Enderlin at St. Martins saw it. When I heard Jen was willing to buy those first two books, I sat down and cried. There was no market for paranormal. No one was writing it then, no store wanted to carry it and everyone was convinced we wouldn't sell more than ten copies.

Against all odds and expectations, ten months before *Night Pleasures* came out, it had an overall Amazon sales ranking of #6. I was the first writer to take a paranormal novel to number one on a major list. I was the first one to take a historical paranormal novel into the top ten of the *New York Times*, and thanks to my wonderful, incredible fans, I have since placed more at number one than any other paranormal author currently writing. I am the first genre author to put an SFR novel at number one since Johanna Lindsey did it in 1993 and I put two of them there last year and they were books out of the first series I'd ever sold. The same series that tanked my career on the first go round.

Things are now looking up, and I keep my fingers crossed every day- which often makes it really hard to type.

Q: What are your goals with your life and novels?

To live the best life that I can, and to not let my yesterday use up anymore of today and none of tomorrow. As for my writing, to keep doing it so long as there is life inside me. I hope to keep meeting my readers and sharing stories and laughter with them.

Q: Do you feel you have achieved your goals?

To achieve a goal, you have to keep working it. I'm still doing that, so I guess the answer is yes... maybe?

Q: Why did you write the *Chronicles of Nick*?

Since the inception of the Dark-Hunter world, I've wanted to write a spin-off series for the Squires. There's so much material there to work with, and I knew it'd be fun to take a Squire and make him evolve into a Dark-Hunter.

When I first suggested to my publisher that we do a series for Nick, they weren't interested. They wanted me to focus on the DH books.

As the DH books grew in popularity and my boys got older, Nick kept nagging at me to do his series. Then one day, my oldest son came home and told me that if he read one more book on his school reading list, he was going to morph into a girl. "Mom, all the books are either about girl stuff and trauma, or they're about how all us guys have wronged all the girls throughout the history of time. What's that about? You know how hard it is to ask a girl out when you've just discussed a book in class about how sorry all men are? I can't take it anymore. Write me a book I can enjoy. Please!"

I promised him I would and so I returned to my publisher and begged for a Nick series. I wanted to write a series that would appeal to both men and women, boys and girls. Something that had adventure and snappy comebacks. Something that lived and breathed, and dealt with the problems confronting teens, and the adults surrounding

them.

My publisher finally agreed and so I started the series as an homage to my boys. So far, I was right and both men and woman, boys and girls have embraced the series.

Q: Why did you do comic books and manga?

I learned to read with comic books and have been an avid fan all my life. While in college, I actually submitted some of the Dark-Hunter stories as comics to DC, Marvel and Dark Horse. All rejected them. Having Marvel finally adapt my Lords of Avalon series was a dream come true.

As for manga, I'm Otaku (in the American sense of the word), and have been since elementary school. The only thing that ever got me out of bed at 6 AM was Saturday morning anime. I love having the DH as a manga and can't wait for the unveiling of the *Chronicles of Nick* manga.

Q: Who reads the CON books?

Everyone. The audience is almost evenly split between male and female, and readers come from all age groups. One of my favorite gifts came to me from a teacher. As a class project, she had her students read *Infinity* and then write fan letters to me. I treasure each and every one. The teacher collected them into a folio that I keep within arm's reach of me, and I smile every time I look at it.

Q: What's the hardest thing about being a writer?

For me, not listening to those evil voices of doubt that ring in my ears, saying I suck at writing, and that I can't complete the book I'm working on- and that even if I do, no one will like it. Self-doubt can be paralyzing, and I have more than my fair share of that.

For others, I think it's the constant criticism that can be overly harsh at times. One of the "gifts" I have from my childhood is that I was always criticized, and as harsh as a reviewer wants to be, they're amateurs compared to what I grew up with. Insults and biting comments roll off me like water over a duck. I have the hide of a rhino. Other writers don't, and they take those comments to heart. I've seen it cause many a great writer to quit and cause them to have a nervous breakdown.

You have to come to terms with the fact that some people can never be pleased, and they're usually the ones who are most vocal. Others live for no other purpose than to attack others. They believe that the only way they can rise up is to tear someone else down. Still others thrive on negativity, and on hurting others. You can't let that get to you. I, and countless other authors, have been attacked very publicly, and it's not always over the books or our writing. Sometimes they're personal attacks over how you look, dress, or even walk.

Not to mention, even your biggest fan won't always love everything you write. Sometimes it's you, and sometimes it's from something in their past that kept them from enjoying it.

I remember reading years ago, a book from my favorite author. In the plot, the heroine marries the man who killed her most beloved brother. Having lost my brother, I could never accept a man like that being near me, never mind fall in love with him. I hated that book, and it had nothing to do with that writer. It was because of my personal experience.

As a writer, you have to remember the old saying: You can't please all the people all the time. Some people you can't please at all. The goal is to please as many as you can and to cherish those who love what you do.

Q: What is the hardest thing about writing the CON series?

Dealing with the people I love while knowing some of them are going to die, and neither Nick nor I can save them. I always have a lump in my throat when I write their scenes. It also breaks my heart to remember how close Acheron and Nick were before they became enemies. I hate to see them fighting. But I know why they have to take this journey. I just hope it all works out in time.

Q: Do you have favorite books or authors?

I have many, many faves. I read some of everything. My all time favorite books are: *The Wolf and The Dove* by Kathleen Woodiwiss. *Devil's Bride* by Stephanie Laurens. Anything written by Jim or Shannon Butcher. *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer. *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde. Anything written by Poe. *Johnny Zed* by John Betancourt. Burt Cole's *The Quick*.

Q: Who has influenced your writing?

The answer is simple. None.

While I've read fiction all my life and have many, many fave authors, none of them have ever made a difference in my writing in any way. I've never tried to mimic anything about them, and even though their characters and books have stayed with me and lived in my heart alongside my own, they've never held any kind of influence over me. Yes, I've admired the beauty of how Oscar Wilde and Chaucer, as well as countless others, turn a phrase, but that's their style, and while I love and admire it, it's not my style or my characters'. Writing for me wasn't like art where I studied another artist and tried to duplicate their expertise. I give other authors their due while I continue on my own by doing things, right or wrong, my way.

But as I was doing an interview earlier today, I realized something. There are actually writers whose works have influenced my writing. But not the way most people think. Since the day I discovered Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* in sixth grade (I really was a precocious little monkey who read above a college level by fifth grade- thanks to my older brother), I became enamored of philosophy, and, more importantly, philosophers. No, I didn't understand everything back then, but I kept returning to those books and mulling their words, gaining more insight and understanding with every reread.

Over the years, I didn't absorb and believe all their theories. Some of them just don't work for my own philosophy and ethics (Rand jumps immediately to mind), but others

such as Hobbes, Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard, etc. appealed to me at my most fundamental level. More than that, they taught me to think and to evaluate human behavior for myself. I went from philosophy to psychology where I explored Jung, Pavlov, Skinner and countless others. That ability to understand the complexities, duality and most importantly the dichotomy of human behavior has influenced my writing heavily because it has influenced my cognition and forced me to evaluate every aspect of not just me, but every character I create.

Another great influence on my writing was a paper I wrote in college. My dissertation was simple, and yet extremely complex. It was that human personality and individuality are defined not by our consistencies, but by our inconsistencies. Those weird quirks we all have- some for a reason and some simply innate. That is the cornerstone of humanity. And that is what I use in my writing.

Each and every book, each and every character, for me, is an exploration of the various, and often opposing, philosophies and theories I was exposed to by those writers. Without their work, mine would not be the same and so I guess in the future, I need a new answer whenever an interviewer wants to know what writers have influenced me.

The only problem now is figuring out the ones who made the most impact. Hmm... maybe I should say Homer and Hesiod, and of course, Plato... definitely Plato :)

Q: What kind of research did you have to do?

All books require some form of research. If you set them some place you haven't been or that you haven't visited in awhile, you have to study those towns and areas, even if it's a contemporary setting. The internet helps a lot with that.

For the mythology and history, I've studied those for so many years that I know most of it off the top of my head. What I don't know, I usually have a friend who does and all I have to do is call them.



General Questions About Being A Writer

Q: What's the best advice you can offer a writer?

Never give up. Never surrender. Fight for your dream and never take rejections personally. Remember, only you hear those voices in your heart and head, and you owe it to your characters to fight for them. Please don't give up. If you do, no one else will ever hear those people who live inside you. For their sakes, keep going even after you're ready to quit.

Q: What are your responsibilities and duties as a writer?

Same as any job. You have to finish projects on time. Be willing to work with others. Be flexible and ready to put out fires when they happen. Think fast on your feet. Balance the job with the family. Keep a positive attitude and don't let the naysayers win. People will always criticize you, no matter what you do. Don't take it personally.

You're also a small business owner, and you have a lot of paperwork and taxes because of that. You will have to take care of your own publicity. Answer emails from both publishers and fans. Many times, you have to design your own bookmarks, website, postcards, posters, etc. You'll need to be part travel agent as you begin to get invited to conferences. Not to mention, you will most likely have to set up your own booksignings for the first few years. You'll need to know how to write a speech, and deliver it. How to field interview questions, and post media.

You wear many, many hats as a writer.

Q: What classes should a high schooler take to help them prepare for becoming an author?

Working for the paper or yearbook will teach you to meet deadlines and write on multiple projects. Sociology will teach you about people and that's the most important thing. You have to know people in order to write them. Likewise, history helps you to know people and to understand cause and effect. But as with all things, it depends more on who is teaching it than it does on the subject matter itself. All classes teach invaluable lessons that you can use in later works. Yes, even math and science. Remember, it was working for a paper and talking to my mythology professor that led me to my Dark-Hunter world.

Q: What is the salary for a writer?

Like all jobs, it varies greatly. Some only make a few hundred dollars a year, others make millions. But the cold hard fact is this, less than 10% of all writers make enough to support themselves, never mind support a family. Only 2% will ever get rich from it. Most earn a salary around ten to twenty thousand a year, if they write more than one book a year. That being said, you also have to remember that Uncle Sam will take half of everything you earn for taxes and your agent will take another 20% (that means you

keep about 30-33% of what you make), and you only earn 6-8% of the book cover price (less on international or club sales, trade paperbacks and other formats). So on a typical \$7.99 mass market paperback novel, the author only clears 25 CENTS a copy after taxes and agent. No lie. I swear this to you. On a \$25.99 hardcover, an author makes only a dollar a copy. Now, out of that quarter or dollar made per book, the author has to pay for all their own publicity such as bookmarks, buttons, mailers, website, etc. Usually they have to pay all their appearance costs when they go to a conference or con.

Q: Is there a particular college you recommend?

Yes. The one that accepts you that you like. Colleges are a very personal decision and you get out of them what you put into them. The best advice I can give is to visit the college you're interested in and meet the professors in whatever major you think you're going to have. Nothing will ruin your grades or your future faster than a personality conflict with a professor who teaches required classes. That can make you miserable. Other than that, it really doesn't matter where you go.

Q: What major or specific degree do you recommend to be a writer?

The one that you enjoy that will give you the highest GPA possible for graduation. Seriously. Nothing will make you more miserable than taking classes you hate and it will show in your grades. I personally think that the classes that helped me most in college were psychology and philosophy because they taught me how to express myself in words and how to understand people and their motivations.

But, I was a history and classics major, and I use those every day in my books, too. I wanted to major in Creative Writing, but the professor in charge of that program wouldn't let me in. I tried three times and on the third attempt, she asked me not to apply again as I didn't write well enough to be in the program, and that the slots in it were reserved for students who had a future in publishing. I couldn't get into journalism because they had a typing requirement I couldn't pass.

Meanwhile, I know a number of bestselling authors who didn't go to college at all. In the end, the decision is up to you. Good luck!

Q: Where did you go to college?

I attended and taught at many. Georgia College, University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Millsaps, Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women. I took both regular and extension classes.

Q: What can I do to prepare for a writing career?

Write every day and study people. Study what motivates them.

Q: Is there a particular skill you learned in any of your high school English classes that helps you today?

Honestly, not really. But two helped me in college in all subjects and that was learning the Five Paragraph Essay, and how to write a research paper. That being said, I did

write in English class, and anytime you write, it helps you to hone your craft. And you learn by reading other writers.

Q: What advice would you give students struggling in English classes?

Hang in there. Keep your grades up. Don't be too proud to get a tutor if you need one, or to ask a friend for help. I'm extremely dyslexic, and if not for my older brother and Spiderman comic books, I'd be illiterate today. Your grade in English class does not reflect your ability to become a professional writer. Remember, my English professor wouldn't allow me into her program. Writing fiction and nonfiction requires a set of skills you don't get in traditional classrooms.

Q: What was your motivation in high school to do well?

Honestly? I didn't do all that well in high school. I had to work two jobs and take care of my severely handicapped sister and younger brother, as well as my mother. The care of my brother and sister fell completely on me. I had to get up every morning and clean and dress my sister (she's incontinent), and get them to their schools, then get myself to school. I went straight from school to pick up my brother, take him to my grandmother and then go to work. I worked until one or two in the morning, came home and had to pack my mother's lunch, iron her work clothes and wash mine. I grabbed a couple of hours of sleep, and then had to repeat that pattern. If my brother or sister became ill at school, I had to check out and take them to the doctor, then tend them until I had to go to work. All of my homework was done either on work breaks or during home room. Needless to say, I was always tired. My only motivation was, and is, to have a better life.

Q: Besides writing the actual story, how do English skills help you in your career?

They allow me to communicate with others so that we all understand each other. My vocabulary allows me to be concise and to convey the emotions I want to in emails and with social media, as well as on my website. Hopefully, it keeps me from looking like a complete moron who can't spell or punctuate whenever I post something :)

Q: If you weren't a writer, would you consider English important?

Absolutely. See the above. In the modern world, we are all constantly writing, whether it's texting, posting, or emailing. Writing is a vital part of everyday life, and it keeps us from looking or feeling stupid. You have to know how to construct proper sentences, convey feelings, and punctuate appropriately. After all, there's a big difference between "Let's eat, Grandma." and "Let's eat Grandma." Or the difference between "Man-eating shark" and "man eating shark."

Q: Do you use English skills for anything other than writing?

We all do. Every time we speak in English, we use English skills. And you will definitely need them if you are ever going to learn a foreign language.

Again, it gets back to the fact that we're always writing something whether it's texting, posting or emailing. No matter what job you have, you'll have to write emails, reports and fill out forms. To do that, you have to understand English and grammar. I even used

those skills while working fast food and retail jobs. Come to think of it, I used them as a custodian, too.

Q: If your English skills were lacking, do you think you'd be able to write your books?

Well, bad spelling and grammar didn't hurt Mark Twain's career. And don't get me started on Chaucer :) Seriously though, yes it would have a real impact. After all, most high school students and others complain when they have to read the above.

The whole point of writing is to allow the reader to escape into your world and to forget that he or she is reading. Nothing pulls them back to reality faster than a typo or an unruly sentence they can't comprehend.

Q: Do you know of a really different job that uses English?

Most of them do as it really helps to be able to speak to get, and hold a job. You can't interview for most jobs if you can't understand English.

More specifically, custodian. As I said, I had to fill out reports and make signs and notes. Fast food: I had to fill out reports and make signs and notes, and take tests to qualify for raises. Store clerk: I had to fill out report, and take a personality and honesty test before I could be hired. Order pickers have to read fast, and pull the correct merchandise. Fill out reports, restock and reorder. There are few jobs in the world that don't require extensive knowledge of writing and language skills.

It's also hard to pass your driver's license test if you can't comprehend the questions being asked. And one quick glance at how obtuse, and poorly written most of those questions are, really does answer this one.

Q: How do you find a publisher? What should I do to find one?

My experience was so long ago, it no longer applies. Back before the internet, we had to call the publishers in New York to find out where to send materials.

The easiest thing to do today is to find a writer's group and join it. They can give you all kinds of support and advice.

If you don't want to do that, then visit the publisher's website which you can google. Almost all of them have a submission guideline page that tells you how to submit your work to them.

Q: How does a book get published?

The steps to publication...

1. You have to finish the book (this is the hardest part for a beginning writer).
2. Depending on the genre, you have to find an agent. You find an agent by following the next few steps after number 3.

3. You study the market and pay attention to the books you read. If you like books from one publisher, then the chances are that's the publisher you're going to want to publish with.

4. You write what's called a query letter (if you look it up online, you can find tons of examples). I'd post one of mine, but honestly I stink at writing them. It's usually a one page letter that tells the editor/agent what you've written, how long it is, why you think they should publish/represent it, and list all the qualifications you have for writing the book. Then you send that letter or email it off to them. You get their addresses from either a writer's group or you look up their submission guidelines on their websites. Follow those instructions to the exact letter. Do not deviate. They will tell you what they want and how they want it. They're not joking.

5. You wait, and wait, and wait, and wait for them to get back to you. If they send a rejection, repeat the steps above until you get a yes.

It can take an editor months, even years, to get back to you. The reason is, they are swamped. In addition to your manuscript, they have books that they're editing that are in various stages of completion and publication, which I'll explain below.

If you don't have an agent, your manuscript is put into a slush pile with all the other unknown writers. Most editors only read from the slush pile one day a month. They read as many as they can. Hopefully, they'll get to yours, but most likely they won't, and so you have to wait until they make it to it. If you're agented, it still doesn't mean they'll get to you faster. Sometimes they do. Sometimes not.

Let's say that they do get to yours and they love it. The editor may need to get another opinion on the book, which can take weeks. Either way, the editor then takes the book to marketing to see if they think it has potential. If marketing approves, they call you to make an offer.

6. While you wait, educate yourself on publishing law and contracts by reading publishing law and contract books. Even the best agent in the world will miss something from time to time, and no one will ever put as much into your career as you do. So you owe it to yourself to understand contracts as they will control the rest of your publishing life.

7. When they call with an offer, take down their contact information and the terms they're offering. **DO NOT SAY YES!** You will be so excited, you have no idea what they're saying or how it will affect you later. Tell them, "Thank you. I couldn't be more thrilled. Let me look over this and I'll get back to you." Memorize that until it's rote.

Hang up and scream. Call your friends and family. Celebrate and then look over the terms once you're calm.

8. That first offer can be for as little as \$500 (that's what I received for my first book) or, if you're really lucky, as much as \$10,000. On rare occasions it's more. But before you run out to spend it, remember you won't get it in one lump sum. It can be spread out over years. Not to mention, Uncle Sam can take as much as half of it, and your agent will take 15-20%. Most advertising for that book will also come out of your pocket.

Most writers get paid in 3-5 payments. Payment 1 is due on signing the contract (which can take as long as two years to finalize- yes, it's happened to me. Normally it's 4-16 weeks). Payment 2 is due when they accept the manuscript. That means that the editor has read it, then given you his or her comments on how to improve it. You work on it and then resend it to them. They read it again and if they don't send it back for more revisions, they accept it. This can take a few weeks, but more likely a few months, and as much as two years, too. Payment 3 comes after the book is published- usually 3-4 weeks once the book is on the shelf. This is the quickest one. So a three payment contract, even if it's \$10,000, can take as long as three to four years to get the whole amount. Not a lot of money. Most of the time, it's two years.

The money you receive up front is called an advance. You won't get anymore money unless you earn that back in sales. Remember, you only make about fifty cents a book, so you have to sell approximately 20,000 books to earn back your advance. Sounds easy, right?

If only. To begin with, the publisher doesn't start sending royalties to you as soon as you've earned out your advance. You only get a royalty statement twice a year. That's a long time between paychecks. Secondly, even if you have earned out, they usually withhold your payments until they're sure that the bookstores aren't returning more shipped copies. Books are sent to stores on consignment, meaning they only have to pay for the books they sell. Those that go unsold are returned to the publishers (paperbacks are stripped, meaning the covers are torn off and the books destroyed). The stores don't get 100% of the money back, but they do get most of it. The author gets none of that at all. Additionally, you won't make money on books borrowed from the library, or any that are bought used or sold on eBay. Nor will you make anything on pirated books. You only earn your 25 cents on books that are bought through legal and new channels.

But wait, there's more. First time print runs are usually around 10,000-15,000 copies, which is why first time advances tend to be low (the number crunchers at the publishers take the average earn-out for the type of book you've written, from how other similar books by first time authors have done, and they offer you an advance based on how those authors have sold). Most writers sell half of the books sent to the store. So in reality, a first time book will only earn \$2500-\$3750 for a first time author, and your agent and Uncle Sam will take a big cut of that. I don't want to scare you off, but I want you to be prepared for the reality of publishing. This is the cold hard truth.

The way print runs are set is that the publisher sends out their sales force to take orders from bookstores and other accounts that carry books. Those orders are what determine your print run. The publisher will then print an average of 2-5%

more than what was ordered so that if an account needs more books they can send them right away.

But I digress. If you have a larger advance or you sell a hardcover, then the additional payments usually are: Payment 4 when the hardcover comes out (usually one year after the paperback) and Payment 5 is six months later.

If you don't earn back your advance, it's often the end of your career. Sometimes publishers will try with another book. But they won't keep you long if your numbers don't grow, and they are notorious for canceling multibook contracts if the first book or two doesn't perform the way they want it to. Like any business, they can't take a financial loss and still function.

9. Once the contract is negotiated and signed, which takes a few weeks to a few months, your assigned editor (normally the one who bought you) will then read the manuscript and make notes on it. It will be sent to you with a letter, detailing the corrections and changes the editor wants. They will give you a couple of weeks or months to do them.

10. You hand the book in again.

11. The editor again reads it. Sometimes there are more corrections or changes. Usually there isn't. If there's not, the editor sends in a request for author payment. BTW, if you have an agent, that payment is sent to them and they have to process it and then send you your portion of it which is one of the reasons it can take awhile to get a check. No one rushes your check through the system. There's a joke in the business that most writers can write a book faster than a publisher can write a check.

Oh, and since I keep using the terms: Publisher is the one in charge of a division of a publishing house. It's also the name used for the business itself that publishes you. Confusing, I know. Editor is usually the one who buys and works with the author. Publishers can also be editors, but editors are not publishers (until they get promoted). There are many job titles within a publishing house, but they vary greatly from one publisher to the next, which is why I'm not even going to try and list them.

How your books are edited and how you return them to your editor also varies greatly, not just publisher to publisher, but even between editors working in the same house (House means publisher). Everyone has their own way of handling edits.

12. The editor then sends the book to a copy editor who reads it, and looks for inconsistencies, and grammar mistakes that you and your editor have missed.

13. Your editor has meetings with Art, Sales and Marketing to discuss the cover and how best to advertise and sell the book. They decide on the title. You will most likely never get to name a book. Sometimes it happens, but it is rare, especially in the early days of your career. Titles are often assigned by the editor and/or marketing. Covers are decided by the editor and/or art. You *might* be

consulted about either or both. Maybe. Even if it's in your contract that they consult you about the cover, it doesn't mean they will.

The cover will be sent to you. If they want your opinion, they will ask for it. They might listen and change it, but most times they won't. At least not until you're much further along in your career.

The same is true of the write up on the back of the book and the title. The things that best control how well your book will sell, are completely out of your control. You'll have to learn to live with that, or you'll quickly go insane. Oh, and everything I'm saying is in reference to a traditional, large New York publisher. Ebooks and small press are a whole different animal.

14. Once the copy editor has finished, you will be sent their comments and you will have to answer each and every query they've made. Some you will agree with, others will send you off into a Hulk style rage.

Yes, there are some copy editors who are incredible. Barbara who does my Dark-Hunter novels is a godsend- those are rare. Most will make you insane. I'm not sure how publishers hire CE's, but some really shouldn't be editing. I've had them insert mistakes into my books, such as one who removed all the hyphens out of Dark-Hunter. She even removed it from the website address Dark-Hunter.com and she left the space there so that it read Dark Hunter com. Obviously, she doesn't use a smart phone or the internet. Another CE took my pass code 6-6-0-5-0-3-1 and wrote it out. So the computer says, "Password?" and the hero answers, "Six million, six hundred and five thousand and thirty one." Huh? Who talks like that? And yes, in spite of my telling them I wanted it taken out and put back the way I'd written it, the book was printed with that lunacy and I now look like an idiot.

You have a 50-50 chance that your corrections will be taken over the CE's. And you are the one who will have to bear the angry and indignant letters from readers who think you're stupid or that you didn't do your research. The CE is off scott free.

Some CE's will go off on you and give you lectures. Most of the time when they do, it will be because they are the ones in error, and yet they think they're experts on all subjects. I once had a CE tell me that I knew nothing about Atlanta or Southerners and how they speak. Kind of interesting since I grew up in Atlanta, and all of my family still lives there- as for Southerners and how we speak... yeah. CE obviously missed the Nashville address at the top of my manuscript, as well as my bio. My favorite was the one who told me the way I described the actual car I drove at that time was wrong and that my car didn't have the factory features my car had. I could go on all day.

What will really make you crazy is that they often lecture you on inconsequential matters, and then let something major go unnoted. My favorite of all time was a book where I had a lycanrope fighting the entire scene as a wolf. Then in the next paragraph, I had the comment that it was a shame he couldn't take wolf form to fight. Er? Still not sure where my head was and how I missed it in my

edits. But I felt better since the CE had missed it, too. Had I not caught it in galley form, it would have gone to press that way. Scary, right? Again, I have many examples of this, including one where half of the last chapter was missing and the book ended with- He picked up his phone and

15. Once you've had a stroke and vented about the mountain of asinine queries, and finished answering every query no matter how ridiculous it might be (why would you call the walls in the room blue), you'll send it back in to the publisher. Your editor and the production manager will then review all of your changes and answers, and hopefully make the changes you requested.

16. They will then put the book into production. This is where the manuscript is formatted and laid out into book form.

17. You will next receive what's called a galley. These are the actual pages that will be bound into a book. And this is your last chance to make changes. But, you can't make too many. Only those that are absolutely necessary as each change costs the publisher a lot of money. Your corrections are made with a colored pencil. Your editor will also review a set of galleys. Many authors will photocopy these pages and send them out to reviewers for advance comments. Sometimes the publisher will bind them into what's called Advance Reader's Copies (ARCs) or Review Galleys, and send them off to reviewers.

Doesn't it make you wonder how so many typos get into books? And yet, even with all of us diligently reading and reviewing, it happens. I will never forget a book where I opened with the sentence, She walked across the rode. Yeah, I'm adequately embarrassed and mortified, and no one in my critique group or publisher, or me caught it until it was on the shelf. The minute I opened the book, I saw it with crystal clarity.

Once you're finished reviewing the book one last time, the original galley set, along with the style sheet that lists how things are to be formatted in the book and the characters who appear in it, are returned.

Your editor and the production manager will then be given a final set to review. You will not see the book again until it's published. If you're lucky, your editor will send you a copy as soon as it's off the presses. You will dance and shout, and hold your baby for the first time.

18. Behind the scenes, your book is being boxed and then shipped to stores and warehouses. The electronic files are being converted and formatted into e-books.

19. Congrats, you're now a published author. And with luck, you'll be writing your next novel (which you probably started the minute you handed the first one in).

20. Once you're further along in your career, you'll be sent on tours. Though those are getting rarer and rarer, and may cease altogether if e-books take over the market, and as more and more bookstores close. But for now... the real fun of promoting the book begins.

And in a nutshell, that's how it all works. Scary, right?

