

## Rewards in Newspaper Writing

I began this satisfying career as a freelancer by writing what I know well--my life and my opinions. I crafted some essays about personal experiences, and nervously sent them out to online magazines. Although they were accepted, I received no pay for them, and a run-around from the editors of the publications. Eventually, I realized that this wasn't worth it. I pulled my essays from their sites, and halted all work for no pay. I read somewhere that writing for free as a beginner is a good way to earn clips and "work your way up". It didn't take long for me to recognize that this wasn't true at all, and I had mostly wasted a lot of time with these publications.

Shortly after my realization, I read somewhere that someone had success from querying local newspapers. I had never written a query letter before, and quite frankly, didn't have a clue on how to do this. In spite of my inexperience, I decided to give it a shot. I wrote out a standard email stating that I wanted to write articles or essays for "so-and-so" newspaper and sent it out to the twelve newspapers I could find in my area. After not receiving a response in a couple weeks, I figured it was a no-go. Then, one day I received a message from an editor of a small, independent publication just 20 minutes from my home. The editor wanted me to call to make an appointment for a face-to-face interview. I didn't expect to have to actually go to the office and meet anyone. That was a wrong assumption on my part. Generally, if you are in the area, the editor may want to meet with you. I was already sweating, thinking about the interview, but I was also really excited that I received a positive response. I made the appointment, and a couple days later, I gathered all of the essays I had written to date and headed to the office. The editor scanned through them at super speed, and stopped at one particular essay I wrote. Without raising his eyes from the piece, he asked, "You're Native American?" Apparently, there was a controversy going on at that moment concerning Native Americans in the state. On the spot he assigned me a piece on the current subject. I was so excited that I was practically bursting at the seams on the drive home. I immediately started researching and interviewing people in the midst of this controversy. After the second revision, the editor asked me if I would like to write an editorial to go along with the article. My opinions kept slipping into the article, and I had a difficult time keeping them out. I agreed, and find out that the writing went much smoother knowing that I had another page set aside just for an editorial on the subject. About two weeks later I returned to the office to drop off my completed article and essay. That had to be the most difficult thing I had to do in this career-submit completed work to an editor in his office. The editor wasn't a faceless person as usual. I could tell he wasn't as impressed with it as I was, but he accepted the final revisions and cut me a check for both pieces.

I love writing, and particularly enjoy writing about topics I have a great interest in. This assignment was one of those. But holding that check in my hand was by far the most rewarding part of the entire process, and it's not necessarily about the money. I finally felt that my work was good enough to get paid for, something writing for free will never do. The confidence in my writing, which I already felt was good, skyrocketed. Writing is a lot easier when you are no longer questioning yourself or your abilities.

Published in Writing for Dollars on 12-1-04 (Issue 12104)