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Writing and Menopause

By Laura Lee Carter

Becoming a writer is made so much more interesting by menopause. Since I'm going through "the change" and changing everything else in my life (hair colors, houses, husbands, etc.), I decided to change careers too. Ask my new and unbelievably patient husband, Mike, who listens regularly to my sobbing fits in the midst of a career crisis turned career change at age 50. I continually rail against the injustice of it all: *"How could those mean old editors ignore my valiant efforts to become a writer?"*

I started out in libraries at 24, always with the understanding that I would change careers as soon as I discovered my true calling. I went through one husband and two master's programs searching for the perfect fit. Then writing chose me. Soon after being laid off from my 25 years as an academic librarian, starting my own dating service and meeting Mike, I hired a career counselor to reveal to me my heart's desire. She suggested writing a local column to market my dating service. The writing freed my soul. I now had no doubt. Writing was my passion. It came to me as easily as tracking down my soul mate, which is to say *agonizingly slow!* But, lucky me, I began working at my dream job, sleeping with my dream husband, and living the life I always dreamed of, the year I turned 50.

It seems I am cursed by the fact my father, a college professor, always *loved* his work. I now know that most people don't love what they do for a living, but this very early propaganda raised my expectations of employment. I knew I didn't *love* being a librarian, but I could never seriously consider becoming a writer. It all sounded so risky and irresponsible. Turning 50 and hearing on public radio that one of my writing heroes, Laura Ingalls Wilder never published anything until she was 60 convinced me it's now or never.

Perhaps unconsciously I was waiting for life to bring me the proper "material" to write about. Yes, divorce, job layoffs, menopause, and all the other illustrious revelations of midlife do give one pause to think. And if you're fortunate, even pause to write. So now I'm busily learning about clips, query letters, writer's guidelines, and waiting impatiently for someone to buy my work, while suffering through hot flashes, memory lapses, crying jags, and various other forms of irrational emoting.

One element of the professional writing experience caught me by surprise. I had no idea how obsessive I could become with my work. Once I got the hang of it: latching on to a great story idea, researching it, finding a couple likely suspects to interview and writing the query letter, I couldn't stop. I just counted up more than 20 queries I've sent out in the past two weeks! At three in the morning, I wake up and immediately start ruminating: *"Am I taking the right approach in that story? Have I offended the editor? Am I crazy to even try to get into this business?"* I had to cut back cold turkey; it was starting to take over my life! This left me wondering if there are 12 step programs for new writers.

The good news is that I now finally know the excitement of "working in the zone." I sometimes get so wrapped up in my research, I actually forget to eat! Up until now, no job could distract me enough to miss lunch, or any other meal for that matter!

The bad news is the insufferable wait for responses. You would think that after 50 years of waiting to become a writer, I could wait a few more months for an editor's opinion. Not so. I thrill in the process of getting excited about the story, the build up to writing the query, and sending it out. Then the serious waiting begins. In agitated anticipation, I wear a path to my mailbox and e-mail account everyday, trying to imagine the wording of that next illusive acceptance note.

I suppose the truth is, regardless of all those mean, thoughtless editors, I will continue to sweat and cry and write because I love the process of creating an entirely new story and sending it out into the world. In the midst of so much change, I feel fortunate to have finally found the two loves of my life, writing and Mike.

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Laura Lee Carter has found some success as a writer after only one year of almost perpetual rejection notes from many editors! Please see her website at: www.lauraleecarter.com for a brief bio and clips.



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