

Dream-Chasers

Categories: Writing

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This whole crazy journey I'm on started when I was about my daughter's age, and had no idea I was even on a journey. I wrote my first short story when I was 8 or 9, and never looked back. I wrote from then on, without even thinking about why. At first I just wrote stories for my sister and step-sister, made them characters in adventures, because while they were hogging the Atari controls, I had nothing better to do. They were experts at Pong and Combat, and I was figuring out the art of storytelling. It was no big deal. Except that it got into my bones somehow, the need to write, to make up stories, to move people with words. By high school I knew that I wanted to be a writer, without having any idea what that meant. Did writing even count as a job? I had plenty of naysayers to inform me that, no, it did not. Writing was a skill all adults needed. It was a fine hobby. It didn't count as a career. But one thing about me: I'm ridiculously stubborn. I mean, most of the time I'm easy-going. I don't care where we go for dinner or what movie you want to see. I'm flexible on that stuff. But when someone tells me I can't do something that I really want to do, that easy-going nature disappears. Give me something to prove or disprove, and you get a whole different girl.

So I went to college and got a degree in creative writing. I loved my program, my professors, my fellow aspiring-writer students. I loved everything except the way everyone kept saying "Yes, but what will you do for a living? A writing degree won't get you a job." So I got stubborn about that, too, and only applied for writing-related jobs. And got one. I started out as an assistant editor just after graduating college. By the time I decided to go to grad school to earn yet another writing degree I was an editor. By the time I finished my master's degree, I was a senior editor. A senior editor with an MFA in creative writing and a head full of epic dreams of publishing novels. But no idea how to make that dream come true.

I started with short stories. I wrote one after another until I felt like they weren't grappling with me for ultimate control anymore. I started sending them out, and got some award recognition, and then I started getting published. I crafted and recrafted them until I'd published almost all of them. I tried my hand at novels, fighting the unyielding beast until I'd figured out the form, the arc, the pacing, the character development, the heart. The first novel I ever dared show the world was a semi-finalist for the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award. I figured I was on the right track. But as I sent that book out to literary agents, I knew something about it wasn't right yet. I started a new novel, with a better understanding of what worked and what didn't. I finished it in a few months, quickly revised it with the help of awesome beta readers, and sent it out to a handful of literary agents. And one of them loved it. A huge agent. One of the big dogs.

So here I am. We're in the revision stage now, where my agent, the amazing Harvey Klinger, sends me challenges for each section of the novel, to make it stronger, deeper, more compelling. He is helping me find the heart of this story, and he is an amazing mentor. I wake up in the middle of the night so excited to wake up and write that I can't go back to sleep. I get up each morning so thrilled with my life that it's ridiculous.

And then I get my girls up, make their breakfast and school lunches, drive them to school, volunteer in their classes, all before getting

to tackle those pages that have been calling to me since the moment I woke up. And that is perfect. Because being a writer is my passion, no doubt. But being a mother is just as important. And my joy at being this close to seeing my lifelong dream come true is twice as meaningful because of my daughters. I want them to see this happen for me. I want them to remember back when I got my first story published and we celebrated with sparkling cider and cookies. I want them to remember the early versions of my short stories that I read aloud as I worked out the kinks. I want them to remember a mom who had a ridiculously huge dream, the kind that is so big that it shouldn't be possible, and I want them to remember the moment when it came true. I want them to dream their own big, huge, ridiculously impossible dreams, and to know in their bones that with passion, persistence, discipline, and focus they can have it, whatever it is. I want them to be unaffected by naysayers, because they know better. I want this dream for myself, as I have always wanted it. But I want it even more for my daughters.

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