

A Writer's Journey with Credit and Apologies to Christopher Vogler

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A writer's journey is at times difficult, fraught with frequent disappointment, and sometimes a total blast. But most of the time, it's work--work to which writers are suited by their very natures. Now that's a generalization, but most of us don't mind spending the day alone holed up in a makeshift office, and that's the truth.

ORDINARY WORLD:

Using Vogler's archetypal analogies, each of us is the Hero of our story. What was my ordinary world like before I realized once and for all that I was a writer? I was a voracious reader from the time I read my first words, "Look. Look."

Of course, I made my living as a nurse—still do—but I always had a great desire to create something...anything. It was crocheting and macramé in the Seventies, writing a historical romance in the late Seventies on an old Smith Corona, interior design school in the late Eighties and early Nineties, and writing La Femme Nikita fan fiction in the late Nineties. When I purchased a PC and discovered surfing the Internet, it opened up a world of new possibilities and friends.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE:

That's the moment when someone says, "Why don't you write a book?" Or someone says, "No one on this panel ever expects to make a living writing." Well, I disagreed loudly on that panel, and while I have yet to make a living by writing, it's a big part of my life.

REFUSAL OF THE CALL:

Okay, I was challenged and being the stubborn type, I responded, but the refusal comes every time I don't sit down at the computer and work on the current book. It comes when I don't send in a requested partial or MS to an editor, or don't even try to find an agent. It comes when I tell myself that I'm not good enough and I won't ever be.

MEETING THE MENTOR:

Hopefully along the way the writer finds a Mentor who guides her/him along the torturous journey or at least plants a boot in the writer's behind when needed. I found my mentor long before I entertained the idea of returning to writing. We met on the Internet and became friends before she revealed her dark secret, but I knew from her intelligent and astute comments on the message boards she knew a whole heck of a lot about writing.

And no wonder...she was a multi-published author who penned a ton of Silhouette Desires. She encouraged me with her comments on the story board--yes, I was writing fan fiction too. Her encouragement was exactly what I needed, and she gave me the most thorough critique I've ever seen. Her advice was the incentive to start the journey to perfect my craft. In other words, that red-lined partial manuscript propelled me on my way. Actually it was a sucker punch to the gut, but it was what I needed.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD:

To take Vogler's archetypal analogies to the next level would require the presence of a Threshold Guardian. Now who would keep me or any other writer from achieving our goal? Something far more subtle than lists of approved agents or recognized publishers stand in the writer's way—it's the writer's own insecurities, laziness, or lack of a proper adhesive to keep the butt firmly glued to the chair. Starting the first book and completing it was my threshold, and nothing can ever be the same.

TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES:

When I had a good start on my book, I joined RWA. Once admitted to this special world, I experienced the overwhelming joy of being with people who spoke my language, who understood the voices in my head and shared the excitement of submissions along with the rigors of rejections. And therein lie the tests: Will I ever finish this book? Will I ever be published? Will I give up too soon?

The sad fact is that your fellow writers can either be allies or enemies. I am fortunate in that Music City Romance Writers is one of the most supportive groups I've ever known. Egos are left at the door. While some are farther along on their journey and some have started a little later in life, we're all writers. I maintain that the worst enemy a writer faces is her/himself.

APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE:

The first book or at least the first draft is finished, and it's time to start submitting that puppy or pitching it to an editor at a conference. Ah, the sweet agony of preparing for that first pitch session. The clothes, the hair, the shoes—all have to be perfect, and oh, yes, the premise of the book memorized and condensed into twenty-five words. Not for the weak-kneed or faint of heart. But absolutely necessary if I was to forge ahead in the career I'd chosen at the late age of fifty-two. Actually I chose the career at the age of thirty, but allowed life to derail my dreams.

As the hero writer approaches the inmost cave, most of us are rejected. Our partial may be requested, but rejection after rejection finds its way into the file. Why keep trying? From the writings of a 14th Century Buddhist priest, Nichiren, in the "Letter to Niike" gosho, warns one of his followers of the need to persevere. "The journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you stop on the eleventh night, how can you ever admire the moon over the capital?"

ORDEAL:

It seems that when a writer is closest to achieving the goal of being published, the more her determination is tested. Just one more submission, one more query, and the right editor or agent at the right time picks up the right submission: Mine! Yes, she wants the full MS, and then there's more waiting. Then there's another rejection, but this one outlines what the project needs. Hope grows and explodes like a Fourth of July celebration over Washington, D.C. What if a writer goes through this same scenario time after time? Closer and closer, but not quite right. Only sheer determination and will keep a writer slogging away at the keyboard in the face of one rejection after another.

REWARD:

Better known in writer circles as THE CALL. Yes, someone loves your characters and your story. You have it made. You call all your friends. You reserve your name.com and set up your web site if you haven't already. You are an author. You have it made.

Well, not quite. There's the ROAD BACK to consider...and the next book. What if no one wants it? Of course, I was working on it while I was doing all that waiting. What if the one I just sold sucks? Don't worry. Someone will love your book, even if it's only your mother or your sister. And for sure, someone will also hate it, and that person will be a reviewer in the magazine of romance magazines, and that review will be on line for all eternity or until their server crashes.

RESURRECTION:

The worst has happened. The reviewer at R.T. gave me two stars and said it was a "weak debut." I hung my head; I got mad as hell, and I told one person who was published and she reminded me that, "It's only one person's opinion." Eventually I got over it...but that damned review is still on line for all the world to see..

RETURNING WITH THE ELIXIR:

Now I could say that the elixir is a big royalty check, but I haven't had any big ones. I continue to perfect my craft and voice, and the friends I've made are priceless. I've had e-mails from readers who love my books and characters...and no, they aren't relatives.

And I still have dreams of hitting the big time, and maybe if I live long enough, I will. Maybe I won't.

LOOKING BACK ON THE JOURNEY:

The journey is ongoing, and it's one hell of a trip.