

# Traversing the Minefield of Doubt & Discouragement

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By Doris Ross

I was recently asked this question by a good friend of mine: “What will happen if you never get published?”

While I was quick to point out that anything posted on our website is technically published and that I do have a story to be included in the next release of *Arrhythmic Souls*, I did have to step back to think on this one. What would happen if I never published anything else? Does publishing on the website really count? Does anyone care?

The answer is something that all writers have to seek out and face for themselves. It’s one that we have to answer again and again – what will happen if nothing else I do publishes? Where do I go from that point on? How do I cope with it? Is what I’m pursuing a fanciful dream with little to no basis in the reality of the industry?

Writing isn’t easy. Anyone can put words on a blank page, string them into sentences, then shuffle them into paragraphs. Some are better at it than others. Yet writing – the act, the industry, the compulsion to tell the stories in our heads – that’s difficult. Part of what makes it hard is the complexity. Filling that blank page is only step one. Improving the content, playing with the words, that’s step two and can carry from that one to however many steps is necessary in order to get to that final form of the story. Then comes the phase we all yearn for and dread: trawling for publication.

Many of us will be laid low by rejections and criticism. I have not yet met a writer that hasn’t experienced it. We cry in our rooms, are consoled by our family and friends, and mentally curse the ones who hurt us – because it does hurt. We’re humans chasing after a bright rainbow, looking for all that shiny pot of gold at the end. We will trip, we will fall. There will be scrapes, bruises, and even broken bones. There are mountains to scale, hills to climb, rivers to cross. To top it off, there are mines out there. If we misstep, any of them could blow up. They might not kill us, but they will make agony an unwanted companion.

The message here is that we can’t pursue our dreams without pain. There will be times we wonder why we’re trying at all. There will be moments when we stare at our work and say, “It sucks. It will never be good.” We will hit the bottom hard and think about other goals to run after. This is an ugly part of our reality. Yet we can’t let this part override everything else.

The difference between a true writer and someone who writes as a hobby is that a true writer will bandage his or her wounds and keep going. We chase the rainbow, the gold, and recognition. We want our work out there for the world to see. When we fall, when we get hurt, we don't toss in the towel. Our injuries become our badges of honor, proof that we are willing to go the extra mile to attain success.

Is it worth it? The gold at the end of the rainbow is just a myth, after all. Yet what if I told you that sometimes it really is there? How do I know? Look at the ones who found it: Nora Roberts, Tom Clancy, James Patterson, John Grisham, any of the prolific authors who were able to make writing not only their passion but a livelihood.

Not everyone gets there. Some never catch the rainbow, never find the gold. Others find it, only to have it turn to coal or wooden chips some time later.

Success in the writing industry is never guaranteed.

As with anything you do in life there is a risk of failure. How many times did you fall off your bike when learning to ride it? How many times have you failed a pop quiz in school? You can't tell me that you've never tripped while running, or stumbled when walking on uneven ground. No one is perfect. No one has all the answers. No one does everything right – whether it's the first time or the hundredth time. Everyone fails.

So what can you do?

Be persistent. Work hard. Don't let your passion for what you're doing flag or sputter out. Think outside the box. Look around on the 'net for inspiration and alternate avenues. New York publishers are not the only game in town.

Redefine success. Every step you take brings you closer to the goal, and that's an achievement. So you got rejected. That's one rejection closer to an acceptance. Your readers didn't like your story – find out why and learn from it. Try it again and see what they say. Learning is as much a success as a rejection.

Take your victories where you find them. Each one will validate you and your dream.

Going back to the original question, the one that spawned this article, I do have an answer for it.

If I never get published, it's not the end of my world. It's not the end of my characters' worlds. I write because the words won't let me do otherwise. I write because it brings me joy. It fulfills me, lets me be God on paper, and is fun.

What will I do if nothing I write ever gets published? I will continue writing. If I really want it in print, I'll publish it myself. I'll post it on the website, give it away for free, sell e-books, hire out for audio recordings, go to a vanity press. Why? Because writing for me is more than just

hobby, more than just a vocation or a job. It's part of who and what I am. It's part of who and what I want to be.

Now answer me this: what about you?