

The Secret Life of a First Time Author

I thought of all the writing, the deleting, the rewriting; all the frustration, all the times I had almost quit.

By Len Schritter - www.SecretLifeofaSnowbird.com

It was a walk I had taken a thousand times. I could do it in my sleep; out through the sliding glass door, across the redwood deck and down the steps, across the driveway and out onto the lane leading away from our house. The sound of gravel crunching under my feet would fill the still afternoon air. After looking both ways, careful not to step into the path of a neighbor speeding by in his pickup truck, I would walk across the road that ran in front of our house.

Yes, I had taken that walk in all seasons and in all kinds of weather, retrieving bills, gathering up magazines, stuffing my fists with unwanted credit card applications, and holding fast onto the occasional greeting card from a loved one.

It was no more than a hundred feet and a return trip of less than three minutes. It was a walk as routine as taking a breath. But on this cool June day, that customary walk held all the anxiety of a climb up a mountain. My book would be arriving today.

It had been a long three years since I first embarked on that distant dream. I had always wanted to write something, someday. But life somehow always seemed to get in the way.

Then at the age of fifty-four I suddenly realized that the clock was ticking. I noticed that a look back down the path from which I had come was strewn with more than a few regrets. Not following that innate call to be a writer was one of the biggest. So I bought a laptop computer and began my project with steely-eyed determination.

I was so green back then, so naïve. How long could it take, I remember thinking, four, maybe five months, six at the most. What I didn't know was that the process of putting words to paper, the ability to put thoughts into

coherent prose was not something that just happened over night. The path that would bring me to get the mail that day, turned out to be a long, arduous journey of disciplined study and self discovery.

As I held out my hand to open the mail box, my thoughts went back in time, back to a few months ago when my newly finished manuscript had magically drifted through the air from my computer screen to the computer screen of my prospective publisher.

I thought of the agonizing three weeks I spent waiting to see what changes my assigned editor would make to my work. I thought of the dozens of sketches and drawings submitted by my illustrator for my consideration. So many decisions needed to be made; the back cover, the front cover, the page layout. My mind swam as something new was thrown at me seemingly every minute of every day.

And then suddenly all was quiet. It was over. All the decisions had been made. The book was being printed. The first copy was on the way. The first copy was here.

I grabbed the handle of the mail box and opened the door. And there it was. Sitting under the power bill and a bill from my dentist, along with this week's issue of Newsweek, was the unmistakable red, white and blue U.S. Postal Service package. My heart skipped a beat as I reached in and grabbed the day's mail.

Once back inside the house I sat at the kitchen table and stared at the package lying in front of me. My mind wandered back in time again. I thought of all the hours. How many had it been, a thousand perhaps? I thought of all the writing, the deleting, the rewriting; all the frustration, all the times I had almost quit. I remembered wondering if it would ever be good enough, ever be worthy of all the time and effort.

As I reached for the top of the package and ripped it open, I thought of the conferences and workshops. I thought of all the books I had studied on the subject of writing a book. And I thought of all the other autobiographical works of other authors I had read, immersing myself in my genre.

Finally, I smiled as I held my book in my hands for the first time. A tingling went up my spine as I looked down at the bottom of the front cover and saw my name. I gently brushed my fingertips over the smooth, glossy cover and a sudden thought jolted through my mind.

It was quite possible, I thought, that in a few months from now a thousand strangers would be doing exactly what I was doing right this moment, holding my book in their hands.

They would then open it up and start reading words that I had written. They would be reading about me. They would be reading my innermost thoughts.

I sat the book back down on the table and looked up, staring through the kitchen and out into the living room. My gaze took in the blue sky that bathed the front window of our house . . . and a sudden realization came over me.

From this day forward, my life might never be the same again.