

WRITERS GOTTA WRITE

By Jill Marshall

Cautionary tales from a well-published author, and many
authored publisher

A Why-to guide on writing and publishing in the 21st
Century

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This book is available from **JillMarshall.co**, from **Jill Marshall Books** and from **Pear Jam Books**.

Jill Marshall is the best-selling author of the seven-book Jane Blonde ® series for girls, with readers in more than twenty countries and ten different languages. With fiction from picture books to adult novels published by Penguin, Macmillan and Hachette over the past seven years, she has first-hand experience of an author's life.

Building on her background in HR/Training and Development, a couple of Masters' Degrees and a decade in writing coaching, Jill established her own publishing company in 2011 to support authors from first words to publication.

When not writing, teaching, coaching, editing and publishing, Jill lies on a sofa with a cold flannel over her eyes. She likes dancing, acting, singing and talking, and one day will summon up the energy to do at least one of them again (apart from talking, which she does all the time). Jill divides her time between the sofa and her desk.

Go to **www.jillmarshall.co** for more information about Jill's books, training and coaching and publishing company.

Introduction

Why am I writing this book?

It's a good question from someone who claims to write all the time and have no time for any more, to the extent that the idea of blogging fills me with a sense of dread. It feels as if I already spend all my waking hours writing, or, at least, somehow involved in the world of writing. Isn't that enough?

The truthful answer is: yes and no. The brutally truthful answer to my own creative self is: yes, you spend all your 'work' time immersed to the hairline in writing; but no, you are no longer doing that writing yourself, Jill.

This will come as an immense surprise to those of you who may have read any of my fifteen well-published books; attended my courses and workshops; been on the receiving end of some editorial commentary from me, or even been published by me through my publishing house, Pear Jam Books. I claim constantly that I am a writer above all else (other than being a mum). The person to whom I make these emphatic statements, most frequently, is me.

So you can imagine that it came as something of a shock to me when I analysed the last few years, only to discover that I hadn't written anything apart from newsletters, training modules, and, I confess, the occasional blog piece for well over twenty four months. Granted, they've been a very busy couple of years, but were they really so busy that I had to inflict on myself the creative equivalent of pinching off a major artery? Surely not.

What actually drove it home to me was a lovely email from my agent. I know. I'm lucky enough even to *have* a literary agent. Many authors spend years in search of one, and I've had one continuously for over ten years. Not the same one, but someone consistently representing my interests in some way for more than a decade.

However, the publishing world – especially my own publishing world - has changed so much in the last few years that I questioned the necessity for an agent, and decided the time had come to part company. I emailed her with the news, and received a very warm response in which she expressed her complete understanding for my wish to pursue my publishing company rather than my own career as a writer of children's and adult fiction.

However, she then added the sentiment that threw me. "I do think you're a very talented author, and if you write anything new in the future and would like us to represent you, let me know."

Wow. An open invitation for continued representation from an established and popular London agent. Authors have killed for less.

I sat and pondered on how to reply, effecting some mental calculations at the same time. Did I imagine myself writing anything new in the future? Well, yes, but in the same way as one would imagine that it might be quite nice, one day, to visit the Taj Mahal. To go back to that fabulous beach-side restaurant in Crete. To turn up at the school reunion having blossomed from geeky no-hoper to stunner, and in the meantime to have married the school hottie. Fond dreams that seemed vaguely possible, but perhaps not very probable.

But ... hang on a minute. I am a writer, first and foremost. That's what I tell everyone, including myself. How could I not be plotting the next new book, or great series, or both?

Then I considered how long it had been since I last wrote any of my own books. This was the next sideswipe. Over two and a half years - that was the answer I came up with. Two and a half blimmin' years. Blimey O'Reilly. My books and the characters within them are my other children; my babies, my little darlings. If I'd sent them all off to boarding school, at least I'd have seen them for Christmas and extended summer holidays. This was the bleak and heartless equivalent of packing them all off together on a ship for the orphaned, destination Australia.

Did I really intend, two and a half years ago, that I would never see my offspring again? Ouch. I'm sure that wasn't my intention. For sure, I have done many other things to do with books since that point, including starting my own publishing company and shepherding two dozen other authors through to publication. My own books? I did publish one through my imprint, but it seemed so unimportant compared with the other authors' offerings that I forgot to even mention it whenever I was promoting the progeny of my company, let alone re-visit it and send it a birthday hamper. Even some basic love and best wishes. What a cruel, neglectful mother I'd become.

My growing comprehension had really started to make me smart by this stage. What other calculations could I torture myself with? Ah, yes. How long since I'd actually made any money from my own books? That would be ... um ... three or four years, since I made anything approaching a living wage. In fact, since I made enough even to pay for my trip to that beachside café in Crete. A one-off visit to the supermarket to stock the freezer was about the most my royalties would have covered in recent years. Owwww. That severed artery started to make its presence known, with panic fluttering beneath my breastbone at every growing realisation.

I decided to take myself in hand. 'You're a very well-published author, Marshall,' I told myself. 'You've had fifteen books published by three of the "big six" publishers. You've sold hundreds of thousands of copies in ten different languages in twenty plus countries around the world. What about all those? You're very, very lucky. That's every author's dream. Surely that tells you that your agent is right: that you're a very talented author ...'

Actually, though, all it did was make me sad. I sold the last of those contracts about five years ago, and that particular deal turned very sour. During those years, I lost my house, all my savings, significant chunks of my sanity, and very nearly my own daughter (though that's her own story: look out for *My Sixteen Candles*, by Katie Marshall).

These days, many of my books are still stocked in high-street shops; I still get fan mail; people have heard of me when I tell them what I do. But five years? If I'd spend the last five years of my previous career (Human Resources/Training and Development) failing to move forward or to meet my annual targets – well, the last five years of my career would have been the last one year of my career.

And that's when the floodgates opened. I cried and cried and cried. For my forgotten babies. For my golden writing career that had brought a degree of fame but no fortune, and for the poignant memories of something woefully neglected, something that used to bring me more joy than practically anything else – writing.

As I sobbed over Outlook, it also struck me that I have cried more in the last two years than throughout the rest of my life put together. For some reason which I'm sure a psychologist could identify in seconds, I've always considered myself to be invulnerable. I'm brave, feisty; perhaps even a little mad at times, as creative people are wont and allowed to be. I laugh loudly and often, much to my daughter's chagrin. Up to the last couple of years, I could probably count out the number of people who'd seen me cry since I reached adulthood on both hands, and still have my thumbs to spare.

The last two years? Anyone and *everyone* has seen me cry. Friends and family. Enemies and strangers. Therapists, social workers, bank managers. I've cried down the phone with insurance assessors and utilities providers; to agents, publishers, editors. In person, in front of the postman. Receptionists and people behind counters in a wide variety of shops and service providers' offices. School principals, teachers, dance instructors. Really, nobody who's stepped across my path in recent years has escaped my face and neck turning blotchy, eyes filling up, voice becoming strangely strangulated.

I can't seem to stop myself, especially when watching reality TV, where faded celebrities or Joe Public are outdoing each other or themselves. I didn't watch one minute of the Olympics, mainly because I'd have been a soggy wreck from the moment the Queen and James Bond appeared to the last seconds of the closing ceremony. I've even developed a crying routine: I usually snuffle and gulp for a while, pull myself together when it turns into howling, then force myself outside for a walk to calm down. These days, the dog sees the Kleenex coming out, fetches his leash and waits expectantly by the front door.

Which brings me back to that email from my erstwhile agent. What had set me off in such a major way? Two – no, three things suddenly occurred to me, as I shuddered and shrieked and banged my head on the table, with the kind of wailing abandon demonstrated by Diane Keaton in the wonderful film, *Something's Gotta Give*:

One. The last couple of years have been very, very tough. (This, by the way, is the least important of the three things).

Two. Perhaps the reason I'd cried so much during those years was that I didn't have any other emotional release. Previously all that anguish, admiration or vitriol would have been poured into my books with all the artistic expression I could muster. I could have pretended they were all someone else's emotions. Me? I'm invulnerable.

Ah, three. Number three. The big one. This was my key realisation. Maybe ... just maybe ... I missed *writing*. Maybe all the other writerly things I do, like editing, publishing, promoting, coaching authors, talking to school kids about books – maybe they are no substitute for the real thing. For my own writing. For me, the author, doing what authors should do.

Even as I'm writing this, I can appreciate that this should probably have been obvious to me a very, very long time ago. I am not unintelligent, nor am I divorced from the world of publishing and the author's lot within it. Quite the opposite, in fact (I mean the publishing bit, not the intelligence. That, I'll admit, I am starting to question).

So what took me so long?

I think it's this: for the past five years, since I became a best-selling author with my book in the top ten of the best-seller list in *The Times* (UK), I seem to have thrown all my energy, resources and creativity into trying to be the best *published* author anyone could ever be. When that appeared to be failing, I devoted all my time to helping other authors be the best published authors they could be.

Do you see? I focussed on the 'published' part, rather than the 'author' part. In so doing, I missed the fundamental point, the piece that is like 'The Secret' for authors.

So, laid out over the pages of this book, are my top ten tips for navigating the world of writing and publishing, of being or becoming a published author, in the 21st century.

You can decide whether to focus on the 'published' piece or the 'author' advice. To each of the points, I have added a couple of key items I've learned, firstly as an author, and secondly as a publisher and/or writing coach. If my "now" self could have sent these messages to my "then" self, it might have helped me along the way.

It's not a 'how to' book, as such. If you want more details on any of the stages I've outlined, I can help you with them, but it would take up more of the book than I care to expend on processes you could follow, which you could learn from any number of sources. I'll take you through a countdown of my top ten tips for navigating this complicated world, and leave you to ponder as I did when that email arrived. To find your own truth.

So if it's not a 'how to' book, then what is it?

It's a 'why to' book. Why write and publish in the 21st century? Because you can.

And so can I. For the first time in far too many years, I'm writing again. Hurrah! It's a very different book to my usual fantastical fiction, of course, but I'm so excited to be writing it. Furthermore, I haven't cried once since I typed the first word. Selfishly, I am writing this book for myself.

That said, I really, really hope it helps you too.

If nothing else resonates for you, remember this: like Diane Keaton in "Something's Gotta Give", you are the star of your own production of life as a writer. It's called "Writers Gotta Write".

Yes, that includes you, my friend.

Enjoy.

Jill Marshall, 2013

Tip # 10: Hop On The Scales

Early in 2000, I had what I call my ‘Millennium Moment’. In one fell swoop, I decided to stop being a Training and Development Director in the telecommunications industry, and follow instead my childhood dream and recently resurrected passion: to write children’s books.

As soon as I had stepped in that direction, it appeared that the universe fell in ahead and started lighting up the pathway for me. I sold my company shares, literally days before the market slumped. I netted enough cash to buy a new house outright for myself and my daughter, and to pay the fees for a Masters’ degree in Creative Writing for Children. At that time, it was the only such course in the world, and guess what? It took place less than a mile from my newly-purchased house.

I spent the next couple of years in a happy blaze of writing. The books seemed to fall out of me; admittedly, not in very good shape to begin with, but getting a little better each time as I practised. Throughout this time, my soul burned with the sure knowledge that this was what I was meant to be doing, and that it would pay off.

My confidence that it would all work out seemed to fill the gnawing hole that had been festering in my solar plexus over the previous few years, when I began to recognise that writing was not just something I wanted to play at. I needed to write. I had to. Otherwise this empty hole was going to expand into a sombre blackness from which I might never escape. Much as I loved my job, it was never going to provide for me the deep, almost spiritual satisfaction of flexing my creative muscle.

For two years, I played with my new friends in my books on a daily basis, sending them on all sorts of outrageous escapades which I would never have dared to undertake as a kid, but which my adult self so badly wanted to be a part of. My daughter and I (and the dog) moved to New Zealand. I carried on playing. It was fun, fun, fun, creating, growing and loving these characters while having my own adventures, settling into a far, distant land.

At the same time, I found an agent who enjoyed the adventures of one of my heroines as much as I did. A year later, we sold *Jane Blonde, Sensational Spylet*, to a UK publisher, for the biggest advance any NZ children's writer had made by that point.

Jane Blonde went on to become a seven-book series, selling to legions of young girls in countries all over the world, in ten different languages. Recently, I was filling in a form to support the Breast Cancer campaign, as directed by the young man from Portugal who had turned up at my door. I specified what I did for a living and mentioned my books.

“Oh, we ‘ave those in Portugal!” he cried. “Of course, I ‘ave not read them, because I am boy.”

I quite understood, and didn’t mind one bit. Just the confirmation that the books had definitely appeared in Portugal, rather than just in Portuguese, was more than enough for me.

Jane Blonde wasn’t my only success, either. My sensational spylet led to further children’s novels: about Egyptian-cursed Jack Bootle-Cadogan; feisty cave girl, Kave-Tina Rox, and strangely feline kick- boxer, Matilda Peppercorn. At the same time, I branched out into contemporary women’s fiction, publishing three novels with another of the ‘big six’ publishers. So far, so good. And it was good. Very good. On paper, at least. Some of the rest, you know already. I’ll fill in some of the other background along the way.

While I was writing all fifteen of these fat, wordy books (completing three or four a year, at some points), I was also remaining true to my training and development roots. I established my writing consultancy to run writing seminars, and coached new authors through the writing process on the journey to their own completed novel. In March 2011, following a devastating earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, I formed a company to publish a picture book by one of my clients as a fundraiser for the city, and so began Pear Jam Books, publishing fabulous fiction for all ages from many different authors.

Throughout the entire time, I have been running workshops and coaching programmes on 'how to get published'. During the last decade, many times over, I've created and re-created my top ten tips for authors on this very subject.

For the first half of that decade, I just tweaked them a little each time I rolled them out to a new audience. Then came the age of the ebook. My first published book came out in 2006. Even at that comparatively late stage, nobody seemed to be worried, enthralled by or talking much about ebooks or digital publishing off-shoots such as print-on-demand. It certainly wasn't reflected in my book contracts.

In 2007, an addendum to my contracts arrived.

In 2008, more change.

In 2009, I started adding in more information about this new topic to my publishing seminars. I did that again the following year, and again last year. Then, just a few months ago, I re-visited my top ten tips once more.

Well, it was hard to believe. While some of the original tenets from my top ten still held true, several had altered beyond recognition - in less than a year. The rate of change in the publishing world appears to be exponential.

For instance, in 2011, Bowker issued 3 million ISBNs (international standard book numbers) to publishers and authors – i.e. to people or companies anticipating that they would publish a book. The next year, this had grown to 15 million. It's anticipated that in 2013, the number of ISBNs issued by Bowker (and this is only for the US) will reach as many as 30 million. Double the number issued last year. Exponential change.

Here's the difference. Ten years ago, my first top ten tips used to focus on how to find and snare an agent, publisher or both.

It was a huntin', fishin' and shootin' guide.

First of all, dress yourself in the right camouflage (i.e. check out the market and make sure your book fits);

Next, seek out the pack by identifying which agents and/or publishers are happy to work with your type of book;

Then isolate your prey from the pack – work out who would be the right person to talk to, find out how they like to be addressed and approached, and get them in your sights;

Finally, prime your bait. Make sure your first three chapters are as sharp as possible, fit the bill in every way, and are supported by all the additional information the recipient might require. Further, ensure that the rest of your book is equally polished and ready to produce should they be requested, and then get going.

As with any hunting, I recommended caution. I'd point out what a waiting game this could be; how you might come home empty-handed, even if you'd followed the instructions to the letter. What the author couldn't legislate for, you see, was the fact that the publisher or agent might already have bigger fish to fry or faster swimmers to get behind. In the worst case scenario, they might just have decided that venison was no longer the dish du jour. They wanted duck – and you had a deer. There might be nothing wrong whatsoever with your catch, but for some reason it still might not get picked up by a vendor. And you might never, ever get to know why.

(It's interesting to note, by the way, that even though this news was fairly depressing to even the most dedicated of would-be-published authors, it was and still is the main topic that most students on my programmes want to talk about. Some have not written so much as a word; nevertheless, the first thing they want to know is what it's going to take to be published! My advice in this case, now and then, is this: write your book first. Worry about the rest of it later. You can't hunt down, bag and serve up an invisible duck).

Do you see how much of that strategy is built around finding an agent or publisher? These days, it's a question of deciding whether you want an agent or publisher at all. In a similar vein, back then the top ten list of recommendations would include stacks of information about bricks-and-mortar bookstores and how they would be approached. Just a few years later, far from being the main focus of our attention and effort, some of the major chains and many of the smaller independents no longer exist.

My earliest top ten tips used to include masses of information about writing, polishing and preparing your manuscript, synopses, and cover letters in order to put forward the very best submission you could possibly offer. Then, if you were lucky enough to be picked up by a publisher, they would do all the ‘other stuff’ for you: marketing, distribution of your book to booksellers, promotions and book launches, grabbing information from and getting it to your fans ...

These days, publishing is as much – sometimes more – about knowing and investigating your market, connecting with them, and using your own platform rather than the publisher’s to give your readers what they want.

The development and change, then, has been enormous, and it’s continuing to shift. I’m very fond of putting information onto a spectrum. In this case, if we were to compare publishing one decade ago to now, it might look like this:

1 decade ago

You write the book

With luck, you get published

Publisher is king, and earns lion's share

All your energy goes in to getting your next book published

Publisher is busy with promotion, bookselling etc

Publisher moves on to next author

Now

You write the book

You decide how to publish

Author is king with lion's share

All your energy goes into ...

... promotion, bookselling etc

Author moves on to next book

This spectrum, then, might be seen as a scale representing the percentage of publishing power owned by the relevant parties.

Then

Publisher has majority of power

Author gets to just write, but has little power (10%)

Oddly enough, this is the normal share of royalties!

Now

Author has 100% of power, IF they can do all the publisher would do

So what are these things the traditional publisher would undertake automatically that the author needs to consider? They include:

Editing – and that does not simply mean proof-reading, but full structural edits that shape the book into its most effective and impactful version. And then the proof-reading, the copy-editing, the re-editing, the copy-editing, the proof-reading, the proof-reading, the proof-reading ... Design – a great cover, an equally great back cover, and wonderful innards with the type of font, text choices and stylistic considerations that will do justice to the glorious cover;

Marketing and promotion that probably targets the bricks-and-mortar booksellers as much, if not more, than the online purchaser;

All that **'social media'** stuff that puts you, the author, and them, the publisher, in direct contact with fans, including websites, Facebook pages, 'look in the book' promotions on Amazon or their own website, and fan management systems;

Conversion to ebook, for sale either on a website, via booksellers' own reading devices like Barnes & Noble's Nook, or from e-tailers such as Amazon and Apple;

Actually **selling the book** by getting it to the bookseller or customer, collecting the money, divvying out the cash, passing it on to you and the relevant parties if there's any left to pass on.

For every one of the items the author can't do for themselves which a traditional publisher would do as a matter of course (at least to some degree), you could knock off 10% for the amount of publishing power held. Authors often imagine it's going to be easy to publish their book, with little appreciation for the production, distribution, sales and promotional processes that make the difference between a book being sold to readers and your opus languishing in your garage. According to ABA statistics, of the millions of books published each year, less than 2% will sell more than 500 copies. If the author isn't able to manage any of these processes other than write the book, then they're really back at square one: they'll have to find alternative providers for these elements of the publishing industry, or gain a quick appreciation of the fact that writing a great book doesn't necessarily mean it will sell. The other choice is to accept that only a traditional publisher will do for that author and their book.

Of course, these changes in the publishing world haven't necessarily made it any easier to be picked up by a traditional publisher like one of the Big Six (Random House, Penguin, Macmillan, Scholastic, Harper Collins, and Hachette, in case you're wondering – though Random and Penguin are now merging into what I love to think of as a Random Penguin, and others are following suit). In some ways, it's actually become harder, as these vast companies attempt to turn like ocean-liners with the tide, and grow increasingly nervous about the onslaught of independent (indie), boutique and self-publishers now shooting past them with the stream-lined speed of a small yacht.

However, before you throw your manuscript, your computer or yourself off the nearest bridge, take heart. What's amazing these days is that this spectrum exists. You have options. You can sit anywhere along that spectrum, and provided you know what percentage of power you're trading to be there, you can be satisfied that what you're doing with your book is the right thing for you and for that particular book.

For instance, if you only ever read print books, you still write in pen or possibly 2HB pencils in longhand on yellow legal pads, and the idea of starting up a Facebook page or a website sends you running for the Xanax, then you're probably on that far left hand side of the publishing spectrum. What you'd really like to do is just write your book, then hand it all over to a lovely traditional publisher who is going to do everything for you. At the same time, you'll recognise that you'll have very little control over many elements of the publishing process, including speed to market, the cover, some editorial decisions, and how much information you'll get about sales. You'll also accept that your share of the rewards will be small, though you can hope that a large publisher will be able to sell enough copies to make it work for you.

Furthermore, you will need to recognise that this is a long shot, and may never happen. To be here on the spectrum, you'll need to have an exceptionally good book which is extremely well-written, along with an element of luck. These days you'll also have to demonstrate that you know one end of a Twitter account from the other and are prepared to put the hard yards into your book promotion, if you're serious about finding a publisher to take you on.

What if you're totally okay with IM and all that? You Tweet before you get out of bed in the morning, video blog during breakfast, Instagram and FB between 10am and midday and then send your new chapter to the Cloud to share instantly with your 800 followers. You, then, are at the very far end of the spectrum, at 100% author power. In this case, your book might not even have to be all that wonderful, as long as your marketing skills are great ...

In that middle 80% or so, I imagine, is where most of us would sit these days. Knowing that we really ought to at least have a look at one of these new-fangled ebooks but really planning to read in print until our dying day. Perhaps owning a Kindle or a Kobo or an iPad, but still enjoying curling up with a book that smells of ‘pages’ on a Sunday afternoon. There are various offerings all the way along that spectrum in the 80% between traditional publishing and complete author control: pure ebook publishing directly from your own website; assistance with printing and distribution; ‘come-along’ type publishing where you have the benefits of a traditional publishing house but are required to contribute to some or all of the costs, and other stages in between. We’ll talk more about each of these in the chapters to follow.

So there we are, for now, in the morphing landscape of publishing. The horizon has shifted. Like a Matrix film, sometimes it stands still long enough for you to catch up, and at other times it bends out of reach, leaving you scratching your head and wondering how you managed to miss the trick, yet again.

In keeping pace with these changes, so my top ten tips have altered too. These days, they are as much about that power distribution as they were once about finessing your manuscript to within an inch of its life in order to get someone – anyone – to read past page two.

Just in case you're bewildered, fear not. I'm going to take you more slowly through your options throughout the rest of the book. Most of all, though, don't forget that old adage: knowledge is power. The more you know about this landscape, the more power you have, and the more positive choices you can make.

It's scary, for sure. But it's also exciting. Very exciting. You can decide for yourself, now, how much you want in. How far you want in. How much you want to get out of it, too.

And for a writer who's gotta write, it's an incredibly interesting place to be. Jump on the scales between old and new publishing, and make a choice.

Dear Jill the Author,

If I could use one of the spy gadgets you invent for Jane Blonde to split time like a ripe peach and end up back with you one decade ago, I'd tell you that there's never been a more exciting time to be an author. In the years to come, you'll go through elation and depression, but most of all you'll go through a massive learning curve that enables you to stay one tiny step ahead of the race. I'm promising you that you're going to love it in the end, though you may well question and even despise some of it along the way.

For now, I'll just say this: write those books. Keep writing those books. Even when you don't feel like writing books, write them anyway – because the time will come when readers won't wait six months or even a year for the next one in the series. They'll want them monthly, or all at once. If they're all written and ready to go (and I mean REALLY ready, as in edited, polished and beta-tested if necessary), then you'll be able to take advantage of these wonderful developments.

You're in for quite a ride. Keep smiling!

Jill the Publisher x

Dear Jill the Publisher,

Hmmm. Hold the phone a moment.

So are you telling me that I'm not going to be as rich as J K Rowling, or as successful as Stephanie Meyer, or the Hunger Games lady? Am I not going to be the next Marian Keyes, Rick Riordan, E L James? Why would you tell me that? Why?!

What's the point if I'm not going to reach those dizzy heights and be mega-mega-mega famous? And rich. Did I mention rich? And really famous? And going to my film premiere with Keanu Reeves since we're talking about the Matrix – that's definitely on my list. I know there's no obvious part for him in any of my books, but I'll write one in soon ...

I just want to be really famous and Warren Buffett rich, to be honest. It's not too much to ask, is it?

Also, I'm a book lover. I mean real books. I like rough novel paper and stiff, touchable covers with shiny stuff and relief patterns on them that I can trace with my finger. I don't even like computers. I can't even do PowerPoint, let alone programming. I'm much happier with a flip-chart, really – once a trainer, always a trainer.

So if it's all right with you, I'll just write some amazing best-sellers and leave it all to you to sort out. Yes? As for keeping writing books when there's no prospect of them getting published – well, I can't afford to do that. I wouldn't want to do it either. I want my books to be read, and if they're not going to reach an audience, I probably won't bother.

Hope that's okay,

Jill the Author

Dear Jill the Author,

You'll see 😊

Jillx

SOMETHING TO TRY:

**ASK TEN PEOPLE TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE LAST
BOOK THEY ENJOYED. AFTER THEY'VE TOLD YOU ALL
ABOUT IT, ASK THEM HOW THEY READ IT – IN PRINT,
EBOOK OR AUDIO, OR SOMETHING ELSE! YOU MIGHT
BE SURPRISED.**

Tip # 9 Write A Great Book, And Write It Well

Back in the days when I used to go to writers' conferences for the mere opportunity to hear from a real live publisher or agent, I'd hang on their every word, listening out for the magic formula that would make them take my book. My book over someone else's. My book for the big money. My book at all, if it came to it.

There was no magic formula, sadly, other than to learn your craft, understand the business, and practice, practice, practice. This, in time, would lead you to the prize they were all waiting for: a great book, well written.

Agents and commissioning editors have always been on the search for a great book, well written: a book that will drag them in from the opening words; that ruffles the hairs on their arms and the back of their neck; that speaks to them in an authentic, unique voice and convinces them that the character is standing behind them, whispering in their ear.

It didn't just have to be 'great', either. It also had to be properly presented in terms of layout, grammar and punctuation, formatting and so on. They needed to be satisfied that, firstly, you could write, and secondly, they wouldn't have to spend eons correcting basic errors in syntax or spelling. One would always have hoped that, had they seen the promise of brilliant prose lurking behind some mangled dialogue and a stream of unlikely coincidences, they might have been prepared to work with the author to pull it out and polish it. Certainly, in the earlier days of publishing, this might well have been the case.

As the publishing houses became larger, however, their lists of published books seemed to shrink, so authors were fighting for position in an ever-decreasing pool of possibility. Up to the 1990s – in fact, about the time of my millennium moment – there was every chance that a commissioning editor would read some of your book, experience that hair-raising exhilaration, and would zip off to their publishing director, waving the next big thing aloft and announcing that this marvellous book would be published by them, and soon.

In more recent years, with increased pressure from booksellers, the marketplace and each other, that lone commissioning editor would stand far less of a chance. While they would still champion your book and aim for it to be the next big thing that the publishing house would bring out, they now had to do so to an escalating committee of sales & marketing staff, design gurus, and bean-counters scuffling over the likelihood of huge sales and best-seller status.

The vast majority of people who ever went into publishing did so because they love books, not profit. Then the tide turned along with the publishing pyramid, and the process reversed. No longer would a proud author take their book to an imprint, and find an editor who just *had* to publish their book who would then push the button on the design-to-sales-to-bookseller process. Instead the request came from the bookseller. Give us more of book type X! Sales reported back to the team: I can sell more X. The team then casts around in their files for something that resembles X, and if it isn't quite in the right shape, they'll ask the author to change it accordingly.

I've seen so many examples of this over recent years that it's hard to pull out just a few, but here are some of the most obvious:

One publishing house wrote in their rejection letter to a well-published author recently that because of the market, they were now only considering books that were of 'blockbuster' quality, and wouldn't be reading any other material. Her book was quite short, so even without reading it they knew it wouldn't suit them;

While dipping a toe in the market for commercial women's fiction (and by this time I was already a best-selling author), one publisher informed my agent that though they really loved my book, they weren't able to take it as I didn't have a back-list of hardback adult fiction in US libraries. Yes, they were actually that specific ...

One of my wonderful authors sent a book to the publishing director of one of the Big Six on a Friday afternoon, after managing to touch base by phone. That Sunday afternoon, she contacted him to say that she was completely in love with it and would be taking it to the acquisitions meeting the next morning. Assured of his first major book contract, the author started chilling the champagne, only to receive news on Monday afternoon that the sales team had nixed the deal, because they weren't sure how they would sell this unique novel. It certainly is unique ... but isn't that a good thing?

This seemingly relentless downsizing of publishers' lists, and the concentration on the few authors in those lists who were already selling many books, has created rather a huge bottleneck of what I call 'The Perfectly Good Book'. Books that are very readable, immensely enjoyable, perfectly formulated and prettily written. They are satisfying, develop a devoted fan-base, and form a fundamental part of the avid reader's library. In other words, there is nothing wrong with them at all ... apart from the fact that they might be a little too unique, or not blockbuster enough. If it's only 'Perfectly Good' and not 'Outstandingly, Astonishingly Great', then it would appear to have no chance of ever getting published.

This has also meant, by the way, that there's no guarantee a publisher will take your next book or series, even if they've appeared to adore your first publication with them. They're thinking about what will sell, not how well you've written your new novel.

Of course, to this somewhat dispiriting picture you have to add the fact that choosing books is very subjective. What one publisher might throw aside in disgust, the next might relish wholeheartedly. The same goes for authors' opinions: just because you think your tale of satanic rituals is way better than Dan Brown's books doesn't necessarily mean that a reader will agree. Ditto for if your mother/husband/children loved it. Please remember that these people are really not going to be the best judge of your book, partly because they have a vested interest in saying the right thing or sometimes the really wrong thing to you, or because they are not industry professionals with an overview of the market and overall standards.

I say this with hand on heart, and a plea to you to understand this point. I have to admit that since I became a publisher myself, I have a lot more sympathy for publishers in general, not least the brave companies that took on my books. As a publisher and, prior to that, as an editor and manuscript assessor, I have had literally thousands of manuscripts come across my desk (or actually, through the ether to my laptop).

From that number, I would estimate that about ten have arrived already in that category of ‘great book, well written’. Ten. One O. Another thirty or so have been at the stage of ‘perfectly good book’ and required a wee bit of assistance to get to the ‘great’ stage. I’ve published most of them with Pear Jam Books, and I’m working on the others!

So let’s say for simplicity’s sake that I’ve seen 1000 manuscripts. Ten have been in that arm-prickling, ‘got to have it’ category. That’s 1%, folks. Another 2 – 3% are going to get there with a little more hand-holding, but in total, less than 4% of the books I’ve seen over a ten year period have been books that I would either want to publish myself, or would feel strongly enough about to promote to other publishers.

It’s very sobering. Only now do I fully appreciate what a miracle it was that Jane Blonde ever kicked her way through to publication with her sparkly Fleet-Feet, and that somehow I’ve managed to keep persuading major publishers to take on my books thereafter, so that at one stage I would have fifteen of the wee devils on a bookshop shelf somewhere.

But here's the thing. Did I write Jane Blonde because I thought that one day she would be the heroine of a best-selling girls' series? No. Obviously it was a dream to be published, but I did not invent my sensational spylet and her insane, rapping godmother with the single-minded goal that she would one day appear in Waterstones or Borders. Nor did I thrash my poor keypad to death with the other six books that came before Janey Brown aka Jane Blonde, just because I had to get them published.

I wrote them because I had to. Wanted to. Needed to.

As mentioned in the opening chapter, recent years have presented me with some difficulties. Yet still I kept writing, right up to the moment when publishing took over. Inevitably, when I'm speaking at an author event, whether to adults or kids or a combination, someone will ask me, 'What motivates you to write?' (Kids will always ask you this, incidentally, because their teacher will have primed them beforehand. They'll also have issued fervent pleas to the children not to ask how old you are and how much money you make. The little darlings will ask you anyway, so be prepared).

My answer is always the same: ‘I can’t *not* write.’ It’s part of me, of who I am. They might as well ask what motivates me to breathe, and the answer would probably be the same as for breathing. If I don’t do it, my body doesn’t like it and I get sick. In my case, apparently, the words are so determined to escape my brain that they leak out through my eyeballs.

I loved writing Jane Blonde. I loved creating the six books that followed in that series, and the six fairly hopeless practice runs I slapped together before Jane Blonde. I was writing for a solid two years before Jane appeared, and wrote many more books after she came about than have ever been published. I’m very, very prolific, and I write for the sheer high, the buzz, the burning sensation in my very soul that takes place when my fingers are flying across the keyboard, and my mind is racing across the planet or through time or from heart to heart ...

Okay, that’s all very well for you, I hear you cry. You got your books published. What have you got to complain about?

Well, mere months ago I would have suggested that I had a lot to complain about. Rather than living the imagined luxury life of a best-selling author, I was living in the dark – quite literally, as our power was cut off. I wound up at my local airport, returning from a writer’s residency in which I ran workshop after workshop for aspiring writers, with the terrible realisation that I couldn’t afford the bus to get my daughter and me home. A sympathetic friend had to rescue us. Far from signing book deal after book deal, I’d find myself standing before a crowd of readers having struggled to pay for the petrol and car park, explaining that, no, there would be no more Jane Blondes. Fans get very cross with you when you end ‘their’ series, let me tell you. It was all the harder to relate the sad news when I wasn’t really sure why it was so.

And then ... the new world of publishing began to blossom. Suddenly, I can imagine all sorts of outlets for the dozen books I wrote that never even made it to a publisher’s desk. There is now a plethora of options for ‘The Perfectly Good Book’.

And I got me some of them thar books. Some are possibly even ‘Great’ but have done their dash with the publisher and I now own them again, or they just didn’t suit at the time and didn’t get picked up (Hardback, US, Libraries. That kind of stuff).

I can’t tell you how freeing this is for an author, particularly one as prolific as I am – and I know there are many more of you out there. One of my agents once told me, completely seriously, that it was not a good thing for an author to be prolific, as the value of their stock declines if they were seen to be churning out books at speed. This view was also backed up by the publishers. Back in those days, all of six years ago, the next book in a series would appear in shops six months to a year after the previous one, and the publisher would find it disconcerting at best, irritating at worst, if the author kept pestering them with yet another book they’d come up with.

What they didn't appreciate or legislate for, perhaps, is the fact that creative people need to keep creating to be more creative. It's a very strange phenomenon which you, as authors, will recognise: as soon as you finish one book, you want to start the next. It was such a fantastic experience; why would you not want to repeat it? And now!

Then, it seems, the more you write, the more you write. Sure, while you're writing large amounts and rapidly, it might not be Booker Prize material, but there's bound to be something in there worth reading. It also means that you're honing, not just your craft, but also your ability to spot the diamond among the crystals.

When you're not able to write at your chosen pace, even if that's a slow, deliberate pace, because you're not required to by your publisher, or because you're still worrying over your last book, or perhaps because you promised your partner that until you made a go of this one (i.e. make some money, after everything they've invested in your mad hobby!) ... then your creativity feels thwarted. It goes off to sulk, perhaps even changes into its nightclothes and takes to its bed. This is the point at which you load all your writing materials into a box and proclaim to the world that you're never writing again.

To my mind, it's rather like the biological process that occurs in the female body after that most magnificent of creations: having a baby. This is how it went for me, anyway.

I'm a single parent, and always have been since my daughter was born. It wasn't the easiest of pregnancies or births, but then loving and providing for this amazing little bundle of life on my own changed me, fundamentally and forever.

For the first four or so months after she was born, I was staggered at how brilliant I'd been. Look what I did, everyone! And I was desperate to have another baby. Hormones surging, adoration ever-replenishing, I couldn't imagine anything better than doing this all over again. Of course, that didn't happen, and after a year or two of sleepless nights and my body becoming my own again, I sort of went off the idea of having another, particularly the thought of being pregnant again. I had a wonderful child and was more blessed than many, so was content to leave it at that. I'm sure that if it had happened, biology would have persuaded me to have baby after baby until we had to move into a shoe ... but when the hormones weren't triggered again, they settled down and eventually stopped being a major feature of my life.

I hope you're following me here, even the guys! Because any writer, male or female, young or old, will recognise this feeling: if you don't move on to the next book, the impetus to write another and put yourself through that pain ever again may eventually fade (though if it's meant to be, it might pop up again in a few years when you least expect it).

If you indulge the surge of book-writing hormones, however, you can take comfort in the knowledge that these days, there is no harm in being prolific. In fact, with voraciously hungry audiences taking over and writing your next book faster than you can do it yourself if you don't stump up the goodies, it's a positive advantage. Then, with any number of ways that you can now get your books to your readers, you can simultaneously feed both your own need to write and your fans' insatiable need for story, at ever increasing speed.

So how does that dovetail with writing that great book? Oh, you still need to do that. You so need to do that. To honour your own creative impulse and respect authors and readers everywhere, you really owe it to yourself and the book world to make sure that whatever you put out there is the best version of the book that it can possibly be.

This means four things:

Learn to write really well. I'm not saying it's easy, but it's definitely worth the effort. There is a great deal of debate of the nature/nurture variety over whether anyone can be taught to write. Some would argue that either you can or you can't. I've usually found that these are the ones who can, and therefore seem to take umbrage at the concept that their God-given gift could somehow be replicated in the less deserving.

Having seen many would-be writers discover their weak points, work on them, and go on to create wonderful books, I would have to disagree with the 'nature' camp. Of course, some people can write better than others irrespective of their professional training. That can't be helped and should not be denigrated.

However, there are plenty of people with huge amounts of potential who have never been exposed to opportunity or learning, or even, in some cases, to books of any kind. They may be late developers, unexpected authors, writers with inauspicious beginnings who then take the book world by storm.

It's probably natural that I would take this view, of course, as I have an academy devoted to the training, coaching and development of authors. I would concur with the naysayers in one way, and that is this: I cannot teach you to have talent. That is definitely something you're born with.

If you've got even a morsel of that, though, then Robert is your avuncular relative. You can learn the nuts and bolts of writing and then improve your technique until the technical considerations of writing a book drop right into the background. Then you can just enjoy being prolific. It's how we all did it, no matter what you're told, even if it was by learning from what our editors pointed out to us.

(If you're interested in improving your writing skills, go to **www.jillmarshallauthoracademy.com** to find a learning strategy that works for you).

Sort the wheat from the chaff; the diamonds from the cubic zirconia. Some of your books will be great. You will know these from the way they poured out of you as if Hemingway himself were tapping out his Cuban cigar on your head and a fiery beam of light coursed through to your fingertips. You will know these from the way you laugh, cry and groan with your characters. You will know these because, as soon as you've write the last words, you are filled with such grief that it's as if it died and joined Hemingway in the stars; and because the next time you want to read a fantastic book, your own is the only one that will do. Other books you write may fall into the 'perfectly good' category, and thankfully these days there is massive market potential in 'perfectly good'. Some may not be so great, but if you've got all the rest moving and heading somewhere, you can consider the also-rans objectively and appreciate that this may not be their time, though it may yet come.

And after considering all that, you can decide what you want to do with them. Yes, I did say that. What YOU want to do with them.

A great book is properly edited. By that, I do not mean you've run it through the spell checker or fancy software programme, or even that you've persuaded your next-door neighbour to give it a once-over. Well, they were a teacher, once - during the war as far as you're aware ... Nope. Not enough.

Many new authors are wary of editing and editors. Established authors welcome a thorough edit as part of the process of creating the best possible version of their book.

There are two types of editing: structural edits (sometimes called manuscript assessment) and copy-editing, which you might think of as proof-reading.

I have never yet seen a piece of fiction that does not require at least some structural editing, and I include my own books in this. The editors on my children's books have been absolutely fundamental to their success, and I cherish and respect their observations.

When you've slaved over a story for months or even years, you're often far too close to it to be objective, and it really, really pays to have a fresh pair of eyes look over it.

Preferably professional ones.

These are the wise folk who will tell you that your plot development is lacking, your narrative voice is all over the place, and you haven't provided the ending that will satisfy your reader.

Copy editing, or correcting typos and so on, is also very necessary, and again, I'd recommend a professional. If you don't know what to look for or what needs correcting, you also don't know how to check whether it's been done properly.

I've seen many, many manuscripts which claim to have been thoroughly proof-read, but because the author's grammar was only, say, 50% of the way there, they didn't realise that their 'editor's' grammar was only 70% of the way there.

Editors don't usually carry out both types of editing – in fact, very few freelance editors do both automatically. Most will concentrate on one or the other, so make sure you do your homework and find the editor or editors who will work most effectively with you and your book.

Take the time and effort to finish your book properly.

Of all the criticisms levelled at digital books, particularly with the proliferation of ebooks, the major one is that the quality is poor.

The story isn't great or possibly even good, and where it might have been improved, they haven't been sufficiently well-edited to be rescued. It's all very well being a prolific author with scores of books out, but it behoves the writer who has *just got to write* to do it as well as they possibly can.

And then, of course, you can disappear back to your snug to write the next one. A good one. No, a GREAT one.

Mmmm. Now, doesn't the thought of that feel nice?

Dear Jill the Author,

I'm so glad you learned a thing or two about the industry while your books were being published. It's been very hard for us, turning so many people away, but you know how it is – business is business.

Jill the Publisher

Dear Jill the Publisher,

I really, really have learned a few things, and I need to apologise for some of my contributions to that rocky road.

Still, I'm not letting you off the hook that easily. At some points in my career, doing things your way curtailed my creativity.

I'm a prolific writer, and a writer's gotta write!

Never mind. I can, now. As much as I like. I may even invite you to join me!

Jill the Author x

SOMETHING TO TRY: ASK TEN PEOPLE ABOUT A BOOK THEY REALLY DIDN'T ENJOY (ANY FORMAT). NEXT, ASK THEM WHAT THEY DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT IT. IF THEY SAY ANYTHING ALONG THE LINES OF: THE CHARACTER WAS RIDICULOUS; THE PLOT WENT NOWHERE; I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND THE DIALOGUE; MY FOUR YEAR OLD SPELLS BETTER THAN THAT DUDE ... THEN YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT IT WASN'T A GREAT BOOK, WELL WRITTEN.

IF IT JUST WASN'T THEIR CUP OF TEA, THAT'S A DIFFERENT MATTER.

Tip # 8: Discover What You Don't Know

As John Cleese famously said: “The trouble with stupid people is that they don't know how stupid they are.”

Now, I am not for a moment suggesting that writers are stupid. Quite the opposite, in fact. It's the ‘not knowing’ piece of this statement which applies to new writers.

This is my most frequent observation about would-be authors: they don't know what they don't know.

In terms of writing technique and the creation of their manuscripts, this relates back to the point I made in the previous chapter about editing.

If you don't know who to punctuate, for instance, how can you possibly check whether the person who's edited for you (*who's* not *whose* or even *whos* ') has done it correctly? Perhaps they should of done it differently. (Ouch; that's *should have*, not *should of*).

There opinion might be no better then your own. (Double ouch: *Their* opinion might be no better *than* your own).

I have seen more examples than I care to remember of all of these and more, in manuscripts that have supposedly – darn it! That’s *supposedly* – been professionally edited.

Not the writer’s fault, however. They don’t know what they don’t know.

In the more technical aspects of writing, you might never have heard of how to ‘show not tell’. You might not know about the omniscient voice, or third person unlimited. Even if you do know about them in an academic sense, you might not be able to recognise them on the page before you. In fact, there are so many things you might not know about writing technique that it’s impossible to list them there.

Do not fear, though: some writing courses and professional editing will help to reach an understanding of what you don’t know, and eventually, you’ll know it.

I would humbly suggest, by the way, as someone educated at Cambridge University and with a Masters' Degree in Creative Writing, that to discover what you don't know most effectively you should aim to learn from a published author in your chosen genre, rather than following an academic course of study. The latter are wonderful for bibliophiles and literature specialists, but don't necessarily delve into the ground-up writing devices you'll need to know about in order to write your book effectively.

If there's a huge amount that writers don't know about writing their books in the first place, it pales to a frilly ghost compared with what they don't know about the world of publishing. It's a vast and ever-shifting subject. I sometimes feel that if I'd known at the outset what I now know about the publishing world, I probably wouldn't have started. It's very daunting, for one thing, especially beginning as I did a dozen years ago – in my thirties, used to being head honcho and now having to fight my way up from the bottom of the slush pile and beg a publisher to take me on. It's a shape-shifter, for another: as soon as you think you've got your head around what element of it, the rules change and you have to catch up all over again. It's also a very unreliable way to make a living.

As the sole provider in my household, my ever-expanding knowledge about the publishing world has regularly grabbed me by the shoulders, screaming, “Ha! I bet you didn’t know THIS when you casually decided to become an author, did ya?” Yes, behind the door to this compartment of my knowledge of the publishing world now lurks something resembling the clown in Stephen King’s ‘IT’. Terrifying. Sometimes, ignorance truly is bliss.

But then ... but then ... well, I’m a writer, and writers gotta write. So would I have done it anyway, knowing what I now know? Hell, yes. I might have made some more detailed back-up plans at the same time (more later), but I’d still have ploughed on, writing the next book and the next one and the one after that and the one that occurred to me the other night while I was pacing the bedroom thinking about the first one and, OOO, where’s that one I wrote three years ago that was a bit like that idea but not as good and if I just tweak that character and the fundamental premise ... yeah, if I just re-write the whole thing and that one and that one and that one ...

You see, now I do know what I didn't know about the publishing world. I can dig all of those half-written, written-but-abandoned, almost-published-but-never-quite-made-it manuscripts and do something with them. If I want to. Because now I know!

And what exactly do I know? I know that it's all changed since I started out. I know about the spectrum. I know that my books can sit anywhere on that spectrum, and that they don't all have to sit at the same point. I know I can take different books or series of books, decide what results I'd like from them and position them accordingly. This is not going to happen without work, patience, or a certain amount of trial and error, but it means that I can separate out my writing like a shares portfolio. I can invest them differently, knowing that some are for longer-term gain, some are for more immediate gratification, and some are just to make me feel good.

I'll also be aware that some may not work and that others have a higher profit margin even though they're not necessarily the books I consider my 'great' novels. I can spread the risk. I can be prolific, and spread the love. This is joy to my author ears.

Let me explain.

Remember that spectrum, ranging from full publisher power on the left (publishing your average blockbuster author – Dan Brown, Lee Child) to full author power on the right (think Amanda Hocking, or E L James)? Well, there are alternatives along the line that allow authors to make different choices about what happens with their books. At one time, not so long ago, the big publishing houses would have poo-pooed the idea of taking note of the other alternatives, but they're now having to sit up and take notice. While they wouldn't have countenanced offering a contract that didn't include digital rights a year or two ago, for instance, they now appreciate that in order to get any slice of that particular pie, they'll need to think differently. Thus flexibility and compromise are born.

Here are some of the different alternatives available these days to the author, of either fiction or non-fiction:

Your book could be published by a mainstream, 'trade' publisher, either one of the biggies or a smaller independent or boutique publisher:

Pros – they might pay you an advance; they do everything else – editing, design, distribution, sales, promotion; you could make it to the big-time and definitely see your book in print and in a store; you might receive royalties;

Cons – very, very difficult to get your book picked up by one of these publishers and it may be a long time until your book is published; the author has very little control; the money is rarely as much as everyone assumes and royalty terms not in the author's favour (hence the 'might' receive royalties); very distant relationship with the publisher.

Your book could be published by a 'new' publisher who has their own publishing imprint, or even, these days, an agent who offers ebook and print-on-demand:

Pros – they will do as much as possible for you including editing, design, distribution, sales and so on; you'll have a high quality product; you'll have more influence over the process; speed to market will be faster; you might receive an advance but more likely you'll receive royalties on a more generous basis than with a traditional publishing house; they'll warehouse stock;

Cons – as smaller publishers with smaller marketing budgets, they won't have as much influence over the retailers; you might be asked to contribute to costs; they might not do 'print' books and focus on ebooks only; they're more likely to fold as they don't have the financial backing of the larger companies; the rare few might be unscrupulous.

You can **self-publish your book with a company offering publishing services:**

Pros - your book is published according to your specifications; you'll get print copies and/or ebook versions; they'll market you on their website; they might include distribution to get your book into retailers, either bricks-and-mortar or e-tailers;

Cons – you'll pay all the costs; quality of the editing and design could be poor, so the book may look self- or vanity-published; sales and distribution is often not as promised or expected; relationship with the packager/service provider ends once the finished book is produced; you'll usually have to hold a stock of books yourself.

You can **self-publish directly with an e-tailer** like Amazon or Lulu:

Pros – it's free to set up, or very low cost; your book is published in print through print-on-demand and/or ebook and/or audio format so no stock management; your book is available for sale through major e-tailers and potentially your own website; it's possible to influence sales through social media management etc; sales information more readily available; your book might be 'noticed' and be picked up by a Big Six or similar publisher;

Cons – success is largely dependent on online marketing, social media influence, and the author having the knowledge, confidence and motivation to manage the sales process consistently; royalties are low as the e-tailer takes a high percentage on all forms of your book; chances of being 'picked up' are still slim.

You could self-publish entirely, with offset printing or print-on-demand from a local printer, and/or conversion to ebook through a conversion house or company like Smashwords:

Pros – you have full control; you can manage costs and negotiate terms of sale yourself; there are no or few middle-men taking cuts of your profits; your book is published entirely according to your vision for it; you can reap all the benefits, and dictate terms if your book does well and gets picked up by a mainstream publisher;

Cons – you pay all costs; the quality of your book may not be as high as with professional assistance; you'll probably pay high costs with no economies of scale especially in printing; you will be responsible for all sales, distribution (where not handled by the conversion house), order fulfilment and negotiation with retailers; your book will be viewed as 'self-published' in an industry which is already saturated, so may find it hard to get promotion and positioning in stores.

On the spectrum, they might look like this:

One, traditional publisher.

Two, new publisher

Three, publishing services provider

Four, e-tailer with self-publishing facilities

Five, stand-alone self publishing

So how would I 'spread my risk' and divide my books portfolio between them?

Well, let's say I'm a romance writer, and I've been stockpiling my books for the last eight years since little Freddie started school. Once I've sorted the wheat from the chaff, I might recognise that I have: one historical romance that is really the tale of my parents meeting, and might not be that fascinating to strangers but is perfect for family members; nine or ten little love stories that I wrote in the early days, that are possibly quite classic formula romances; three or four which were written while I dabbled in erotica, never imagining they'd ever get published; and there's also this last one which somehow grew into something much more all-encompassing than those earlier romances, and has a really outstanding plot, if I say so myself.

Boil that down a little further and what I have, then, is a range of books: historical romance – just for family; mainstream romances; erotica; a 'great' romantic novel.

Already, I'm starting to feel that the 'just for family' book probably won't get anywhere much, but I'd still love to print a few copies for my parents' golden wedding anniversary.

The mainstream romances are just like the ones I read myself; perhaps even better. Now, who publishes those?

The erotica – well, I'd be a bit embarrassed if that also came out at my parents' golden wedding anniversary. Maybe I could put that out under a pseudonym, and just as ebooks. It seemed to work for E L James!

And as for my wonderful romantic novel ... hmm, there's just something special about that. I'd really love to see it in readers' hands on the bus or the train, or someone lying by the pool on holiday. It really should be the next Jane Greene ...

Next, I investigate. I find out what I don't know.

With my investigation of the romance market, I'd discover that those romance stalwarts, Mills and Book/Harlequin, have a massive following and are always on the look-out for new authors, particularly if you're prepared to adhere closely to their guidelines. Furthermore, they pay well! And if they don't want them, there are new romance publishers like Entangled who appreciate series like mine.

Self-publishing my erotica sounds rather beyond me when I can barely open Facebook, but a company like Smashwords does the conversion for me, and for free – and it looks like erotica is quite popular on their website, so there are obviously readers out there. Add to that the fact that they'll also send my ebooks to companies like Barnes & Noble, Apple and Kobo to sell to the general public, and I might even make some money.

That family book – well, I do really want to do it. Mum and Dad being the age they are, they'll want to see it in print. And of course, I want to put photographs in there too. How about I club together with my siblings, and we get fifty copies done by one of those packaging/publishing services companies? I don't want to have to work out how to get it all printed myself, and I don't really understand what print-on-demand is, so I'd really like it if a company like that could edit it, stick a nice cover on it (that photo of them at the beach, perhaps, on the day Dad proposed ...), and then print fifty for us in time for the party.

Which just leaves my Big Fat Greek Novel. Jeez, it's good. I've amazed myself with how good it is. Did I really write that? I can barely remember. It was more like channelling than writing. I think it's worth giving that a go with a bigger, mainstream publisher. It really deserves to be in print, on bookshop shelves, talked about at book clubs - again, if I say so myself. Now, I know that make take a long time, and it may never happen, but now I can set myself a deadline. If nobody's taken it within ... what, a year? ... then I'll publish it myself on Amazon, in print through CreateSpace and in ebook form through their online process. It can't be that hard; so many people are doing it.

As for totally self-publishing in print? Okay. I can't afford it and I realise I don't know what I don't know, so I might leave that until I've learned more about the industry, and I've made a massive name for myself!

What I've discovered I now know is this:

Traditional publisher might be Little Black Dress, or Mills and Boon.

New publisher – Entangled.

Publishing services provider: Hay House's Balboa Press.

E-tailer with self-publishing arm: Amazon.

Stand-alone self-publishing facility: Smashwords.

So on my Romance Spectrum I might try:

Traditional publisher might be Little Black Dress, or Mills and Boon. My Big Fat Greek Novel to agent! 10 romances to M&B.

New publisher – Entangled. Try my 10 romances

Publishing services provider: Hay House's Balboa Press.

Yep, good for Mum and Dad love story.

E-tailer with self-publishing arm: Amazon. My BFG novel if not picked up in 1 year.

Stand-alone self-publishing facility: Smashwords. Okay.

This is good for my 3 x erotica!

It's wonderful. So many options! D'ye know, when I first started out – in fact, even as my books were first being published in 2006, there was really only one choice available, and it was in that first column. Furthermore, as it was incredibly difficult to break into, it was only a choice in the same way the lottery becomes a choice if you decide to buy a ticket. I'd be very excited to be you, right now!

Of course, this does all apply to me, too. My Jane Blonde books are still published by mainstream publishers around the world. For the time being, that will continue. Certain other of my children's titles have been published but the rights have now reverted to me, so I will now re-publish them with a wonderful 'new' publisher (namely Pear Jam Books, my own publishing house). My adult fiction is ideal for the ebook market, though I'd love to see it in print again someday, so I'll publish myself under Smashwords, Amazon and my own websites in ebook form only, and see if they get picked up – because in the end, I really want to write and not have to worry about all the logistics of the publication process for my own books. I'd like that sensation of being 'looked after' that one gets with a trade publisher.

As for this book? It's rather different to any other book I've written, as it's non-fiction. I'd still like it to be available in print for those who aren't yet familiar with ebooks, but I'm also very comfortable with it being available in digital formats. To that end, I'm introducing this book to the world through the safe hands of non-fiction ebooks: Amazon. I'll also know that it can be available through Amazon's Createspace print-on-demand facility for anyone who wants a 'real' book.

However, to my mind the true home of personal development books such as this is Hay House, founded by the great Louise Hay, so I will try HH first to see if I might have the slightest possibility of publication with the greatest and best, giving myself a deadline that keeps my options open. You'll know by now, if you're reading this, what stage I'm up to!

And here's how my portfolio might look, with a view that any might be picked up and moved to column 1 if the circumstances are right:

Trad publisher: Jane Blonde series 1 - 7

New publisher: Jack BC series, Matilda Peppercorn series, School of Ice series

Self-pub etailer: Writers Gotta Write

Self-published ebooks: The Two Miss Parsons, As It Is on Telly, The Most Beautiful Man in the World

Meanwhile, here's what you should be up to in order to establish what you don't know about the publishing world:

Investigate. Start in a small way and work your way up.

For instance, even if you never intend to read an ebook in your life, let alone publish one, do at least take the time to find out what they are. Download one for free to your computer and read it on Adobe Digital Editions, which is also available for free. You might not like the experience – or then again, you just might! If you'd like to try it right now, go to www.pearjambooks.com and download the free ebook that's available in the top right corner of the home page. You can also install Adobe Digital Editions from there.

Get a feel for the **benefits of certain publication methods for different genres**. As mentioned here, romance and erotica have huge digital markets; crime and thrillers work well in this arena, too. Picture books lend themselves incredibly well to apps. Audio books are becoming ever more popular, and easy to distribute and receive. What about films of books, or books of films, or films of games of graphic novels ... If you begin to think of publishing in the sense of distributing story or information to readers, you'll see that it extends into many sectors now, and it's wise to be at least aware of all of them.

Why should you do the above, and make any attempt to discover what you can about this world wide wonder of publishing? Well, it means that whatever route or routes to publication you take, it makes you confident enough to have a half-way sensible conversation with the provider. Whether it's Simon the Random Penguin or Perks the Printer down the road, you'll instantly stand out as more knowledgeable, professional, savvy and committed than the last green author who believed that all you had to do was write a great book.

Then, of course, you will be able to do what Mr Green the author will not yet be ready to do. You'll work out what you're doing with your books, get on and do it, send them away on their great adventure and get on with what you do best.

You'll jump to it, and write your next great book, in the warm and comforting awareness that you can write this just for the downright pleasure of it. In the fullness of time, you can pick a road for it, and wave it on its way.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

Which one of these are you? I'm confused.

Jill the Author ☺

Dear Jill the Author,

I know. We've been a bit confused too.

If I'm honest, we've been the first type of publisher and realised that it's not going to cut the mustard with all these changes that have going on. We're developing. Morphing. My suspicion is that, at some point, all big publishers will have to offer all of these options to keep up with the market and serve the authors most effectively.

Until we get there, we're trying, I promise!

Jill the Publisher x

Dear Jill the Publisher,

So, let me get this straight. You work for me now, right?

Cooooooooool!

Jill the Author ☺

SOMETHING TO TRY: PICK A COUPLE OF YOUR FAVOURITE BOOKS, THEN DO A BIT OF GOOGLING AND SEE THE NUMBER OF DIFFERENT VERSIONS IN WHICH IT IS AVAILABLE (EG PRINT, EBOOK, APP, GAME, FILM, INTERACTIVE CHAPTER DOWNLOAD, AUDIO).

THEN FOLLOW THOSE VERSIONS BACK TO THEIR PUBLISHER OR CREATOR. THE DETAILS OF WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND HOW ARE BEHIND EACH VERSION MAY BE THE SAME, OR IT MAY DIFFER WIDELY. PONDER FOR A WHILE ... THEN NOTE DOWN ALL THOSE NAMES. YOU MAY NEED THEM SOON.

TIP # 7 Establish Your Author Profile

I'm afraid that, these days, it isn't enough simply to write a few books and get them out there in order for your author profile to become established. If you're one of the lucky few who get picked up by Schuster Harper and have massive promotional machines behind you, then you may find that it happens by osmosis. Otherwise – or even if you are one of those lucky few – you're going to have to work on raising awareness of you as an author. And yes, I'm afraid that does mean performing the Facebook Fandango, Tweeting like a bluebird, and exchanging reciprocal reviews with five hundred other authors all trying to do the same thing.

I'm not going to tell you how to do that, however. For one, I'm really hopeless at it. I really only peck around the edges of the whole 'platform' issue, occasionally throwing my toys out of the pram and yelling, "But I don't WANT to go on YouTube! Isn't it enough that I've written some books?"

Actually, no, it's not enough, but I'm not expert enough in any of those technology-based promotional tools to pretend to inform you about them here. There are several strong books, any number of online and live workshops, and subject matter experts who will coach you in how to manage this aspect of your author life, or even do it for you. If you find this area interesting, and you know that you can make it work to your benefit, then go for it. Me? Can't be bothered with it, sorry – as you can tell.

However, just in case you can't bear for me to go on without letting you in on a few of the target areas to consider in the online/social media milieu, here are a few things for you to consider:

A strong, interactive **website**

Blogging, either in writing or by video, or a combination of the two,

Twitter, Tumblr, your own YouTube Channel, perhaps coordinating them all with a package like Hootsuite

Reader sites like Goodreads, Shelfari, Shelf Awareness

Reviews and recommendations (often for other authors)
on Amazon, Smashwords, Book Depository, BookPeople,
retailers' review sites

Quite evidently, you could spend all your time managing the various media which are meant to be aiding you in your author career, while they're eating into the resources you would otherwise use to write the next book.

What's really annoying to me, though, is that they work. They really do. And anyone who can be bothered to find out how much they don't know about this subject and then force themselves to become expert in it deserves all the success in the world.

I just know how much I don't know; appreciate that with the best will in the world I am never going to be interested in much of it, and therefore understand that my choices are either to get someone else to do it for me, or accept the consequences of not doing it.

What I would especially need to get my head around is when lesser books than mine (in my opinion!) perform better because that author has not been so silly and has worked the system.

How can I be mad about that? It's like that bumper sticker: The harder I work, the luckier I am. So all power to their elbow or their texty little thumbs, and I'll just deal with the fallout.

There is another reason, though, that I'm not going to focus too much on the creation. That's because I don't much like the way this seems to dominate all discussions about how to be a great author with a decent profile. It isn't *all* about Friending people on Facebook ...

Without over-stating the obvious, what it really takes to be a great author is to write great books. There is more to it than that, however. Authors become public figures, if only by internet persona or a photo on a dust jacket. By dint of having read your book, readers and uber-readers, whom we shall henceforth know as 'fans', want and expect to be able to communicate with you. If you genuinely wish to remain completely anonymous forever, then write under a pseudonym and devise a very clever marketing plan a la Lemony Snickett, by which you are only ever presenting a pretend version of yourself to the world.

Otherwise, you'd better be there, and you'd better be genuine. There's nothing more disappointing to your fans (other than never hearing from you) than meeting the zany, urbane, risqué writer of toilet humour for eight year old boys, only to discover that you're a middle-aged, waistcoat-wearing baldy whose hobbies include bowling and macramé. That's like Catfish for readers. Not to say that you never write under a pseudonym, because clearly you can, but be careful how and when you reveal your true self to your ardent fans.

A part of being your true self is working out what kind of author you'd like to be, and therefore where you're going to focus your efforts to communicate with readers. For me, there's no authorly pleasure as huge as meeting a fan, face-to-face and with a bit of time to chat and get to know each other. There have been a couple of wonderful occasions where either the publisher or the fan's family (they're normally nine year old girls, so can't do it themselves) have arranged a meeting. It's usually over high tea, and usually involving a pink-cheeked, round-eyed, silent child - until they work out I'm really normal (relatively). Then I can't shut them up, no matter how many scones with jam and cream I shovel into them.

Anything which involves live interaction gets my vote. I love giving author talks, from ten would-be writers in a community centre to six hundred kids in a school hall; from one-to-one coaching for authors to a university lecture theatre for students of literature, media, film-making – heck, anything that’s remotely related to writing and allows me to spiel at them for half an hour. I’m very happy doing webcasts, teleseminars, live-stream video conferences, and video blogs ... and just check out that list! They’re not the kind of things you would expect a confessed technophobe to know about, are they?

Yet I do. I enjoy speaking about books and writing ... the dog ... dinner last night ... so much that I made myself discover what I don’t know, and learn how to manage it so that I do know. I’m no expert, by any stretch of the imagination, but I can gather thirty people in a virtual conference room and talk at them for a couple of hours without batting an eyelid.

This self-awareness (not Shelf Awareness; that’s the reader site) has led me to a wonderful realisation: the type of author that I am is a vocal, voluble one.

I like talking. I like meeting people. I love face-to-face interaction.

Therefore the type of author profile I have established (and would love to do more of!) is that event organisers know I'm good value to roll out in front of a crowd. I'm a people person, usually keeping others reasonably entertained, and I'm genuinely interested in what people have to ask ... say ... demand.

For instance, I'll never forget launching two books at once in front of a large crowd in a city library. One was a children's book (the third Jane Blonde, Twice the Spylet, as I recall) and the other an adult novel. It was a very mixed crowd, from tiny tots to pensioners, and with two sets of publishers presiding over events.

It was the most nervous I've ever been as a speaker, but once I got going and had the audience laughing, I really got into the swing of it and carried on for forty five minutes, barely pausing for breath.

At the end of my talk, I asked for questions. One teeny weeny of about three years old stuck up her hand in the front row, and wrinkled her nose at the ceiling. “Is there ... hmmm, is there ...” We all waited with baited breath. “Is there a *point* to what you do?”

As you can imagine, the room erupted. Suddenly a hundred or more faces were staring at me, aghast and amused, wondering how I’d handle it.

Luckily, I was able to answer her very honestly. “Do you know, honey, I ask myself that question a lot,” I said. “But then I come to a library like this, and it all becomes very clear. The point is to meet wonderful people like you.”

She looked satisfied with the answer. Actually, I’m pretty sure she hadn’t bothered waiting for the answer and had stopped listening, as children do the moment they’ve popped out their question.

Nevertheless, it was a heartfelt reply, and one that I have made my mantra. It's not possible to meet all my readers, but if I connect with them in some way, then that's the point. And other than through the book itself, the way I like to connect is in person. Failing that, I don't mind emailing, as long as it's personal. I can't count the number of times I've answered a fan's email and found myself in a protracted exchange, trying to prove myself:

Is that you? Not an automated reply?

Yes, it's me.

Yeah, but is that you, Jill Marshall, though?

Yes, it's me, Jill Marshall.

Really? Like, not Jill Marshall's secretary?

I don't have a secretary. Yes, it's really me.

It can't be. Jill Marshall's like a totally famous author.

Oh, thank you. Well, maybe not as famous as you think, and I still answer my own emails.

Long pause Naaaaaaaaaaaaah! Go on then, prove it!

At that point I have to list all my credentials, quote some memorable line from a book or two, write a special Jane Blonde spy mission just for them, and promise to send them a signed copy of a book which they don't pay for and which will probably get me into trouble with their parents.

Now, clearly I can't email all the people who write to me. There are a few with whom I've established an ongoing rapport, but for most of the others I have to resort to newsletters. However, if I could get all of them together in a room or a theatre for an hour or three, then I'd be in my element, and hopefully, the fans would be in theirs.

My ultimate fan dream, which I'm just about to embark upon, would be to set up a club for readers where they can come along in groups and learn some useful stuff, like self-defence, and how to apply blusher. It would be like Brownies, but for girls in silver lycra. Silveries, perhaps.

Anyway, that is a very long way around the houses to give you some food for thought. Consider what you would like your author profile to be. Are you brilliant at blogging, but catatonic with nerves in front of a crowd? Then the online angle is for you.

Do you detest the thought of rug-rats pulling at your shoelaces while you're trying to speak, but really quite fancy the idea of speaking to mature students about literature? Then a helpful website with a monthly newsletter on writing hints might be the way to go.

It's not a 'one-size-fits-all' solution which is what irritates me about the 'online marketing is all' camp. You can pick and choose to a degree, as long as you are abundantly clear on the fact that you will be expected, by fans and publishers alike, to communicate with your readers and be prepared to have a stab at one or more forms of media to make it happen.

Just to help you focus, have a go at making up a strap-line for yourself – a few words that describe you and your style. Mine, for instance, which I worked out quite recently, is 'Entertaining. Enlightening. Engaging ...' From now on, I will attempt to make sure that all my writing and related activities fit those descriptions.

It also establishes the type of author profile I want to promote: fun, informative, genuine. The way I would prefer to do that is live and face-to-face, but it also gives me the flavour with which I can imbue my websites, any blogging I may do, and even the dreaded (in my case) Facebook.

All at once, rather than listing the eighty two social media things I need to do today, I can just think about how I can be entertaining and/or enlightening and/or engaging with as many of the people who would like to connect with me as possible, even when it isn't an option to meet in person. Finally, to my immense relief, it's not about Tweeting and Hootsuiting. It's just about being me, with people who actually want to reach out to me or vice versa. Heck, I can do that. That's easy! That's just stuff I do all the time.

Right. We've talked about readers, fans, silveries and so on. Let us now consider the other party who have a vested interest in your profile: publishers.

If you are self-publishing, then obviously you don't have to be concerned about this, other than being keenly aware that you will have to do all your promotion yourself!

If you are intent on finding a publisher, however, both the traditional and the contemporary boutique varieties will require you to undertake some promotion, and to be prepared to do something to sell your book on a regular basis, possibly even daily.

This is another element of finding out what you don't know about the publishing world. I have come across authors in recent times who claim that they won't have anything to do with promotion and 'all that selling' stuff. I understand completely; it's not a natural bent for many authors, particularly when you consider what an introverted bunch we tend to be.

However, they need to know that if they're not prepared to jump in, they won't get published. If they do manage to make it off the slush pile and into publication, they won't stay there for long. My Jane Blonde books have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. The new book I published myself and forgot to mention to anyone? Maybe a hundred and fifty. Copies, not thousands of copies. You can see, it does not happen by accident, and though it can be boosted by a degree of good fortune, the plain truth is that books require promotion in order to sell.

It's also true that refusing to get involved in promotional exercises is a sure way to royally hack off your publisher.

Remember, that publisher you waited years to find? The publisher who took your dream and turned into a reality?

It's interesting. Publishing companies are not perfect, by a very, very long way. I've spent many years being extremely angry about the way publishers treat 'the talent', and rightfully so. My publishers have made money when I haven't, promised to publish books and then failed to do it, neglected to send me any kind of information. Until recently, I hadn't heard from a soul at my major publishers for almost three years. Not a phone call, an email ... even the Christmas cards stopped arriving. That is just not right, whichever way you look at it.

But then I became a publisher myself, and for the first time I saw matters from their point of view. Boy, was that an eye-opener.

Suddenly, I was painfully aware of the time constraints involved in trying to juggle a dozen books or more through editorial, design, conversion, printing, production, sales and the million other little cogs and widgets that feed into the publishing process.

I was even more acutely aware of how much money it all costs, with no guarantee of ever seeing that investment again. And, I'm really quite ashamed to say, it was brought home to me just how difficult authors can be without meaning to be, because they're really only focussed on their own dream and can't comprehend what the publisher is doing behind the scenes and between phone calls, pretty much constantly, in order to bring out their book.

I thought back, then, to some of the times I heard that my publishers weren't very happy with me as an author, and every single incident came back to that one issue: I didn't know what I didn't know. I'll give you some embarrassing examples:

One. Jane Blonde was given the great honour of being a World Book Day charity book in 2008, among ten notable titles by real authors. Famous ones. The publisher was planning to fly me from New Zealand to UK for promotional purposes. Being a single mum without much money, I asked if they'd pay to fly my daughter over as well. Otherwise there wasn't really any way I could make it. Now, it wasn't an unreasonable request in the circumstances, but I was rather demanding and petulant about the whole issue, and of course they hadn't budgeted for two round-the-world tickets. Needless to say, I didn't go to the UK! The book still managed to sell 200,000 copies and get into the Times top ten bestseller lists; just think what it could have done if I'd turned up for some promotion.

Two. My picture book, *Kave-Tina Rox*, was published in UK and France and was being launched in New Zealand at a big children's literature event – the country's biggest, in fact. I was very disillusioned with the NZ literary scene at the time, and the event did clash with my daughter's birthday, so I decided not to attend the event. That's all it was – I simply pulled out, little thinking that thousands of hardback picture books were being shipped around the world at that very moment. Needless to say, that particular publisher never had much time for me!

Three. I decided that I was a very special author and that the perfectly decent advances I'd received were no longer good enough. I instructed my agent to go back into negotiations with a request for a six figure advance. *A large* six figure advance. Apparently, my agent told me afterwards, the publisher nearly fell off her chair when the number of zeros was mentioned. Of course, I'd heard all the tales of massive advances and huge film deals that every other author has heard too, but I hadn't appreciated the reality, which is that

1) those tales are blips; the exception rather than the rule
and

2) those tales are often nothing like the true figure.

Needless to say, I didn't get a six figure advance, and in hindsight I was pretty lucky to get one at all, given what a prima donna I'd turned into.

Please, please don't think that because I'm now a publisher, I've rolled over on authors' rights.

Not so, at all.

Authors deserve more kudos, more consultation and more of the profits than they have received in the past, and I will campaign for this to my dying day.

Hailing as I do from a commercial background, I have always found it bewildering and more than slightly frustrating that the author is treated, not as the major shareholder who provides the mainstay of the publisher's business, but as a non-employee who doesn't even get the benefits and payment of the most junior member of staff. It's a familiar tale in the arts world, of course, but just because that's the way it has been, does not mean that it should stay that way.

However, what I would now point out to authors is that publishing is a business, and I would suggest that communication between publisher and author should be the same as if it were in a business environment – on both sides.

Yes, the publisher should be more informative and clear, but the author should also remember that no boss really has his door open 24/7, no matter how interested and communicative they are. And they do have other people to look after.

Yes, the publisher should be open to negotiation according to contribution, but the author should also recognise that demanding a 500% pay rise is never going to be well-received. Nor is refusing to make yourself available for promotion.

If you turned up at your office one morning and announced, “You know what? I never liked doing admin, so I’m just not going to turn up on admin days after today,” then the company might feel quite entitled to suggest that you probably shouldn’t be paid for those days. In fact, they might even feel entitled to invite you to seek employment elsewhere.

For many, many years, publishers have gotten away with much wrongdoing because authors didn't know what they didn't know. There's a vague chance, I suspect, that the balance may tip too much in the other direction, and publishers could go out of business because their authors become too demanding.

It's a matter of respect. Mutual respect. I have a policy of allowing three 'outrageous' in my publishing company. Why three? Because up until the third time, I can forgive the outrageous request/demand/behaviour as a sign that the author doesn't know what they don't know. By the third time, they should know.

As an author myself, I now know enough and then some, and because of this I am able to have a professional and mutually respectful discussion with any publisher in the world, where we create a win-win situation that allows us both to prosper and get on with what we do best.

Which for the author, naturally, is writing the next book.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

Even though I don't think you publishers have got it right yet, by a long chalk, I do suspect that I perpetrated more than my fair share of outrageouses!

A little ashamed, I have to say – and mad at myself, too. I can see now that on a few occasions, just by being a bit of a diva, I actually stopped the thing happening that I most wanted to happen. Doh.

And, um, sorry.

Jill the Red-faced Author

Dear Jill the Author,

We owe you an apology too. If we'd explained a little more, kept you more regularly updated, and given you some justifications and transparency around our decisions and activities, you would have understood more, and the outcome might have been different.

Maybe – hopefully – it's not too late. Mutual respect. I like the sound of that.

Jill the Publisher.

SOMETHING TO TRY: FIND OUT HOW YOUR FAVOURITE AUTHOR HAS ESTABLISHED AND GROWN THEIR PROFILE. CONSIDER WHAT MAKES THEM STAND OUT: ARE THEY CONSTANTLY ON BOOK TOUR, MEETING AND GREETING AND SIGNING BOOKS? DO THEY KEEP UP A REGULAR CONVERSATION ABOUT THE NEW BOOK THEY'RE WRITING? DO THEY MAINTAIN A MYSTERIOUS PERSONA, OR ARE THEY CONNECTING ON A PERSONAL LEVEL?

FINALLY, CONSIDER HOW THEY ARE STACKING UP IN THIS NEW MULTI-MEDIA PUBLISHING WORLD. I'M WILLING TO BET THAT, UNLESS YOUR AUTHOR WAS A HOUSEHOLD NAME A DECADE AGO (AND EVEN IF THEY WERE), THEY'RE DOING AN AWFUL LOT MORE THAN JUST WRITING A BOOK AND BASHING IT OFF TO THEIR EDITOR.

Tip # 6: Think About Why You Want To Be Published

So you now know much, much more than you did before about the world of publishing. My suggestion at tip number 6 is to think loooooooooooooong and hard about what it is you want to achieve by being published.

I'm not saying, "Really? After everything I've just told you, you *still* want your book to be published?" Honestly, I'm not. Especially not in this day and age where the 'published author' dream is within reach for so many more people.

At one time, I used to try to avoid the subject of getting published on my 'how to write' workshops, because I knew that there was very little I could offer on the subject that would be positive. Delegates would insist, invariably, so I'd give them a tiny taste of the realities of the publishing world. Instantly, the prevailing mood in the room would drop. I'd send people away depressed instead of uplifted, and believe me, as a trainer that is not the effect you are aiming for. These days I can proclaim, hand on heart, that if you want to be a published author, you can do it! Yes, you can!

What I'm asking you to do, though, is consider what it is you're expecting or, at least, hoping to receive or experience as a result of being published. There are a number of answers that are usually generated by this question:

For **catharsis**;

For **validation** that I can actually write, and to prove to myself that I can do it (especially with all the rubbish that's out there);

To **express myself as an artist**;

To **express my message**;

To **reach fans**;

To **reach family**;

To **be rich**;

To **be famous**;

To **be rich and famous**;

To **get the film made**;

To be **rich, famous, get the film made**, and then write more films. In LA. In my house with a pool, and cocktails, and a pool boy.

They're all perfectly legitimate reasons to strive for publication. Completely understandable, too, given the tales of mega-success and overnight fame we are fed by the media. However, hopefully a glance down that list will lead to a recognition that some of these goals are easier than others to achieve. Moreover, some of these goals can be achieved, at least to some degree, as a result of the author knowing which form of publication can deliver results. You can then choose which road to travel, depending on which reason or reasons resonate with you.

Remember, however, that it pays to be brutally honest with yourself in analysing this point.

Don't kid yourself that it will be enough to see wee Janice and Jimmy holding your book for a smiley photo with Miss Kindly the Kindergarten Teacher, when really you are aware that Miss Kindly is related to the Kindle Kindly family, and your secret wish is that she'll mention it to Daddy and then you'll be HUGE.

Similarly, do not try to persuade yourself that your message is the one important thing, and that if ten people feel better because of your book, you can die a sweet and saintly death, when deep down you're convinced that millions of people will hear about this book because of your message, will buy it up in frenzied midnight raid on Walmart, and then you'll be HUGE.

At the other end of the scale, don't convince yourself that you're just in it for the money (which is fortunate, by the way, as it's unlikely to be as much as you imagine) when actually you're terribly proud of your novella and would love to see it win the Orange.

It's horses for courses; you need to know which course to take in order to fully back your horse.

Let's take them in turn.

Catharsis

The benefits of ‘writing as therapy’ cannot be underestimated. I’m planning, one day soon, to interview the dozens of authors I know *personally* whose books were borne of the life-changing experiences they’d undergone. If I’m acquainted with scores of writers who started out this way, then if we extrapolate, there must be thousands of authors who needed to write it right. Just getting this book out of my brain and onto a page has helped me think through some of my history in greater depth and with sudden understanding; I can only begin to imagine how much individuals could need writing to get them through the darkest of times.

They don’t always write about what happened to them, of course. Sometimes they escape into fantasy. Many do purge on the page, however, and if that’s a reason for writing, then that’s good enough. That is more than plenty. If it’s helped you get things off your chest, examine your life effectively, and gain even just a little clarity or release, then writing has done its job.

Occasionally – and it is only occasionally – the book turns into something that can help other people as well as the author. From the manuscripts I've seen and the published memoirs and self-help books I've read, a book's ability to appeal to a wider audience depends on a few key factors:

Credibility – why should someone listen to you?

A certain objectivity – has enough time passed to allow for a more dispassionate account, that doesn't simply come across as bitterness. For example, this book would have been a very different account if I'd written it four years ago. And I would have kept it all to myself.

A bonus of 'what's in it for me' – lessons shaped for the reader, or a reflection of the reader's own life that makes them feel understood, or, sometimes, just a thoroughly good read.

Do try to have a glance over your book to see how it stacks up against these criteria before deciding it will definitely be the next 'Angela's Ashes' or 'Chicken Soup'.

If catharsis is your goal, then I truly hope you reach a place of understanding and peace with what's happened. Relax now. It's time to start anew.

If you then want to share that with more people, check off the list above, and go on to 'Expressing your message'.

Artistic expression

If this is your goal, turn straight to the last chapter, pat yourself on the back and then disappear to write your book. You're done.

Validation

For me, one of the strange backlash effects of the changing publishing world is that it's no longer quite as 'special' to be a published author.

Right up to the last year or two, if strangers asked what I did and I told them I was an author, they'd be vaguely impressed. When they discovered that they had heard of me, they were even more taken aback. If it came to the point of establishing that one or more of my books were sitting on their bookshelf at home, then 'impressed' would turn to 'astonished'.

There would be frantic phone calls home: “Judith! That Jill Marshall who wrote those books that Ellie’s always bleating on about – she’s at this conference! Yes, way! Get Ellie out of bed, pile all those dog-eared books in her filthy school satchel and come and interrupt this Marshall woman in the middle of her speech so she can sign them. NOW!” Okay, I’m sure that wasn’t exactly what they’d say on the phone, but that was often the end result. And I loved it, I admit. Still love it, in fact. Read earlier chapter on meeting fans. Sighhhhhh.

As I’ve found increasingly over the last year, however – in fact, even over the last six months – the news that you’re an author these days is more likely to be met with a brief nod and a “Yes, me too.” Then you’ll chat a little and discover that your fellow author once uploaded a PDF on trimming begonias onto Amazon, which was bought by four members of their gardening club. Several bystanders will join in and reveal their own publishing background, too, and suddenly you find yourself promising to invest in a new PDF on begonia upkeep and a steampunk fan fiction piece featuring a character called Pervy Petunia. And you don’t even like gardening.

Yet who am I to tell them that it's really not the same? This is what the advances in publishing allow for: the democratisation of publishing; the ability of the individual to reach out with their passion, without the need to jump through blazing hoops and be knocked back to harsh reality by a bunch of rude, harried editors.

Still, I have to admit that it feels rather like telling someone at a party that you're a Formula One driver, only to have all those around you nod and say, "Yes, I've got a car too." Then watch, as the discussion turns to how their Fiat Pugnose corners that blind junction near Tesco off the A59 ...

If this all sounds a little bitter ... a bit of a moan ... rather reminiscent of the cry of, 'In my day, authors had to FIGHT for publication; FIGHT, I tell you!' – then that's probably true. I fess up. But that's only because I have analysed what prompted me to put myself through the agony of trying to get published, and once I was already published, trying to get more published.

What I found was that, for the first half of my author career at least, I wanted validation. I longed for the approval of someone whose opinion I could truly respect – a publisher. Cravenly, desperately, I pursued publishers across the globe so that someone on high could decree that mine was indeed a good book. A worthy book. A book they believed in. This is why authors are prepared to withstand the ritual torture of the rejection letter, or worse still, the sado-masochistic anguish of a plea to ‘wait for the next acquisitions meeting. In three months. Then we’ll see.’ For three months you can do nothing. Nothing at all. Normal service stalls completely until you hear back from Zeus the publisher. Someday, after years of submissions, the verdict is issued. “And so it shall be.” You experience the unadulterated joy of knowing that your book has made it and you, dear author, are *good enough!*

The day I heard that Jane Blonde had been enthusiastically accepted by the publisher stands out as one of the most joyful of my life. My ego had been stroked by angels; my struggle over the past four years to keep writing in the face of continuous rejection was eradicated in one bliss-fuelled phone conversation, and my dream had come true. I was validated. My ticket stamped. Entry to the exclusive club of published authors granted. Hallelujah!

With my daughter away, I had nobody to celebrate with, so I dragged the poor, long-suffering dog to a majestic, black-sand beach, sparkling with silica. I strutted along it for hours, feeling as powerful as the force that had created the towering, pounding waves and the briny breeze in my hair. Me and God, I thought; we're in this together. What a darned good job we'd both done on our respective creations.

Then I found a beautiful hotel in the countryside and bought myself a glass of champagne. At a table overlooking the emerald hills, I slugged it back, only stopping myself from buying the bottle as I had to drive home.

Because soon I'd be rich.

Soon I'd be able to pour champagne on my cornflakes, for crying out loud.

Soon I'd be better than God; I'd be Midas! J K Midas!
Mwah hah hah haaaaaa ...

That glass of champagne was probably where the rot set in. It was the moment when it should have become smack-in-the-face clear that validation alone would not be enough in the long term. While it was and has remained a vastly important foundation for my published career, I now recognised that I would like to make money at this, if possible. Preferably a lot.

For a few years, though, I was able to carry on feasting upon the continued validation, as book after book was commissioned by a growing stable of publishers. As long as I didn't focus on the fiscal side of it, and as long as I managed to reach readers and connect with them personally (my other great motivation, I discovered), then I was able to experience a fairly constant sensation of being the luckiest person alive.

In feeling happy with my work, I kept my creative valve open; the more I wrote, the more I wrote. Anyway, I could hardly call it work. I got to sit around and make stuff up all day. How could it get better than that? Apart from when clever people like publishers told me that I was doing well, by taking on another book or two. That, my friend, was nirvana.

This is also why the only publishing option available on the spectrum that would have fulfilled my wish for validation was that one on the far left: a traditional publisher giving me a great big tick in the ‘approve of your writing’ column by taking on my book. If this is your motivation, too, then you should concentrate on creating your great-book-well-written, try to get yourself an agent, and put together the most amazing submission that a publisher has ever seen.

Once published, that validation will sing to you every time you see your book in a shop, or even better, in someone’s hand. I’ve had the immense pleasure of walking into a large bookstore and practically falling over a shelf chock full of my books, all face out.

The shop was expecting me, of course, and I don't know that they would have been displayed there the previous week, but whatever the cause, the sensation of having 'made it' was enormous. That came from having been published, several times over, by a large trade publisher with all the might that they could bring to bear to marketing, promotion, sales and shelf-filling.

(Incidentally, newer publishers will also fit into this category of validation even if they require a financial contribution, *provided* they offer a partner publishing solution and only take on books they feel will fit their list. If they publish anything that is paid for, then this won't provide the same validation, especially in the eyes of other published authors).

As for that glass of champagne in the countryside ... what I didn't stop to register, I suppose, was that I did also have another motivation, albeit deep down. It might not even have been a motivation, as such; more of an expectation that having made it to 'published' with a popular book, it would just work out this way.

You see, I wanted, if not to be wealthy (though that would have been nice), at least to be comfortable as a result of my books being published. At that stage, I didn't really have any options to influence that. Contracts were signed, wheels were in motion, and I must simply wait for the outcome. Nowadays, there are many more options you can select to affect how you might expect to make money in this game.

Until we get to that stage, however, here is the next category.

Expressing yourself and your message

These are not necessarily one and the same, obviously, as one can express oneself artistically in writing without having a particular moral to impart. However, expressing opinions and knowledge and passing on a message do tend to fall into the same category. We might call this: 'I have something to say'.

Previously, these books would have been classed mostly as self-help or personal development, and were the domain of a few noteworthy publishers (e.g. Hay House).

Occasionally authors do fictionalise their message, often in an attempt to spread it among the uninitiated so that folks who wouldn't normally gravitate towards the philosophical, philanthropic or metaphysical might absorb it anyway. In this vein, we have seen the rise and success of business novels, moralistic young adult books, and best-seller spiritual guides like *The Celestine Prophecy*.

There are other areas of fiction where 'I have something to say' can be the prevalent theme, the most obvious being historical fiction and books for young children.

I've read hundreds of picture book manuscripts where the background theme was built around a message. Eat your greens. Be polite. Share your stuff.

In the historical fiction that I've assessed over the years, huge chunks of a massive tome will be given over to the author-as-expert as they pour onto the page every single item of information they have ever researched about their chosen topic.

In both cases, I have to warn you, it takes a very skilled author to manage the balance between fiction and information so that it isn't too overbearing and didactic. So it isn't actually just non-fiction with a few fancy additions. If this is your chosen genre, then, it would probably be as well to ensure your editing is not only thorough, but is also completely objective.

Lately, it seems, there has been an explosion in the genre of 'I have something to say', since the supply of ebook and print-on-demand hard copies became accessible to mere mortals rather than publishing gurus. Suddenly other gurus have been springing up all over the place, as anybody with expertise, experiences or passionate commitment to a cause can find a vehicle for their message, clamber aboard the A-train, and ride that beast all over the world. If I were to classify it, I suppose this book you're now reading would count in that category of 'I've got something to say'. Consequently what I'm planning to do with it is board the A-train (with A standing for Amazon) and toot toot my way into writers' homes everywhere. Fingers crossed.

Just a few words of warning about books with a message:

One The numbers of such books has snowballed, so just be aware that you'll be in a market of many. Maaaaaany many many. Many many many many many many. Nuff said?

Two. Books of this type are often used as sales tools for online marketers, so they may be given away for free or at a minimal price as a means of enticing someone into a sales funnel. As a result, the public may question what's so special about you that you're charging for your book, and you may find yourself having difficulty shifting it in volume. You may even end up giving it away. An added effect is that the quality of self-help books may be seen as less important, as it's really used to drive traffic to other commercial ventures, so in general these books are very much seen to be in the 'self-published, poorer quality' basket.

Three. In similar vein to point 2, ‘I have something to say’ books are often better seen as a platform for launching other products or services. If you are publishing it for these purposes (and why shouldn’t you? Your other products and services may do wonderful things to promote health, well-being, emotional stability ...), ensure that your other items are ready, and that your social media machinery is geared up to managing sales and communication with followers.

I’ve already said it, of course, but in case you missed it – the way to publish a really excellent example of a book of this type is through one of the dedicated publishers (so do your research). Alternatively, you can publish both excellent and less excellent books yourself as ebooks and in print via Amazon, Lulu, Ex Libris and so on. Frankly, Amazon is where readers expect to go to find this type of book, so you could do far worse than self-publish with them.

Reaching fans and readers

If your aim is to reach as many readers as possible, then this is a fabulous time to be writing. I'm writing this book propped up against a mound of pillows on my bed, with the dog snoring between my feet. From the unparalleled safety and warmth of my own home, I can create to my heart's content, then send it out to an avid readership with the click of a button. All right, maybe a few buttons.

Whatever. It's really light years away from having to print it off and post it to publishers – one at a time, if you please, and if they take four or five months to get back to you, that's just how it is ...

I have certain pieces of writing that never made it to publication, or are much shorter than my standard books, or that head off at a tangent and follow just one character rather than the whole crew. I wrote these just for fun: for the pleasure of trailing my anti-hero to find out what he gets up to in his spare time, or to fill a happy hour on a train. In the past, these would have been slung into the back of a drawer because they wouldn't be 'publishable'. They'd be too short, too one-dimensional, too different to my usual offerings.

This is actually one of the issues I started to hit when Jane Blonde became very popular: everyone involved, from publishers and booksellers to readers and school librarians, just wanted me to keep writing more Jane Blondes.

I was very happy to do seven – or 007 – of the spy novels, but I also wanted to experiment and flex my writer's muscle. Thus began the constant cycle of trying to reproduce Jane Blonde in a variety of forms while I really wanted to be writing something else. I didn't want to stop writing Janes, but variety is sometimes what the author requires.

Had I been faced with that dilemma now instead of five or six years ago, I would have offered a solution. How about, I would have suggested, I write Jane Blondes for mainstream publication, but I also let dedicated fans have access to the little side stories. They can have them for free, because I enjoy writing them, and I think they'll enjoy reading them – and it can also be something I offer to them exclusively to show my appreciation for their readership.

Then at the same time, I'll write that other series that my muse is prompting me to try, and I'll pop them out as ebooks, directly to anyone who might want to read them. I don't mind who, or where, or even how - at least I'll know they're 'out there' and they might be bringing some pleasure to someone, somewhere.

It'll be like taking a writer's mini-break; from a weekend away I'll come back refreshed, ready to tackle as many Jane Blondes as you (publishers, bookshops, spylets) want me to create. Deal?

Of course, that is exactly what I'm proposing for my own books right now. It's also what I suggest you do, particularly if you know that the more you write, the more you want to write. A writer's gotta write, right?

This is nothing to do with the money. How much I can make. When I'll get spotted and handed fame and fortune on a platter, tablet or e-reader. This is simply about finding the courage to go along to your first candle-making class, and discovering that there are other people who love candle-making just as much as you do. What's more, they spark up the candles you made to light the way while they're making other candles. You, meanwhile, can use the waxy stumps of the burned-down examples you created earlier to cast interesting shadows on the wall, half-beams for you to follow. If this is for you, jump on Smashwords right now, and start sharing your creations.

To be rich, famous, get the film made, and marry the film's star

Look, this one's so huge, I'm going to make it into a tip all of its own. Go to the next chapter for dealing with money, and meanwhile here's something to try.

SOMETHING TO TRY: Complete this sentence. *I would love to be a published author because ...*

Then below your answer, complete this sentence, too: *If I achieve that, however, I would also like to be a published author because ...*

Finally, beside that answer, complete this sentence: *If I were to achieve one and not the other I would rather that it be (first or second). If I don't achieve either I will feel ...*

Go on. It's your own piece of paper. Nobody's looking, and nobody's judging. My only request is that you are very, very honest, and take yourself seriously. And if you discover through this process that all you want to do is write a book to see if you can do it (which is a laudable aim in itself), then you can save yourself the trouble of trying to get published at all.

5 Don't Publish For Fame, Fortune And Celebrity

I'll put fame, fortune and celebrity into the same category, as they do seem to be inextricably linked in the mind of most would-be authors. Of course, the truth is that you can have fame without fortune, or riches without stardom, or celebrity without either of the others (usually known as notoriety).

I was debating this very issue with my brother recently, and I scoffed at him referring to me as 'famous'.

"I am so not famous," I said.

"We went to a dinner party last year," he said patiently, "and mentioned you were an author. The host's kids repeated my surname, worked out what first name might go with it, then squeaked and ran off doing that OMG thing, because they had your books upstairs. That's famous."

"Yes, but ..." I spluttered. "It's not *really* famous. Not like being recognised in the street famous."

Then I considered the futility of my own argument. I'm an author, not an actor. If I trotted around the streets dressed in silver lycra and spy-glasses then some people might just work out who I am (and would tell me never, never to go out dressed in silver lycra again). But being an author does not make you a household face. A household name, though – perhaps that does count as fame.

So maybe I'm a little bit famous, in certain households, among certain readers. That much I can admit to. What I definitely am not, however, is rich. Whichever way you look at it, I am not rich. At present I don't own a home or a car, am pretty much penniless, and without some hand-me-downs and careful purchases four or five years ago, I'd be clothes-less too. Apart from my attractive lycra spysuit, of course. And while I will readily confess to not being the best manager of money in the world, the bare facts are that I haven't received very much income from writing.

The moment my financial wellbeing slid severely downhill was the very moment that I decided that I *surely* must be a successful author by now (remember that 2008 World Book Day book?) and therefore I should be able to live from my writing.

Almost overnight, I ceased the other activities that I undertook to bring in money - editing and renting out sections of my large house - and eagerly awaited my next royalties cheque.

Whoops.

It was horribly small. Considering that it covered book sales for the last six months of the previous year which had included Christmas, and also considering that I knew Jane Blonde had been sold into at least a couple of other countries during that period, it was *shockingly* small. If I'd still been in my previous job as Training Director, it would have constituted a week's salary.

I went into meltdown. The mortgage was due; I couldn't suddenly pick up new tenants or editing clients, and despite my agent and I being convinced that there must have been an error in the calculations, such as a decimal point in the wrong place, we were assured that the amount was correct and there wasn't any more money on the way.

Suddenly it was three months later and the bank were more than a little shirty about not receiving any mortgage payments from me.

The upshot was that, less than six months since that fateful and dreadful decision, I had to sell my house at a considerable loss and get out of Dodge. As I'd also discovered, somewhat belatedly, that renting out my home was how I'd *actually* been making money, this also meant that my real source of income had been severed.

Like every other would-be author on the planet, I had believed the stories I heard of six figure advances. I dreamed of writing that I 'divided my time between several homes in exotic countries' in my author bio, I believed I would regularly be receiving passive income in obscene amounts while I swanned around, making stuff up. It didn't even strike me when my first book deals came in that the reality didn't really match the fantasy; I was just so happy to be a well-published author that I sort of assumed it was coming.

Well, you know what they say about people who assume ...

It's the same with the film deals. Every author, particularly of commercial fiction like mine, hopes that one day a film producer will stumble across their book and ZUMPH! There it is in celluloid.

Actually, the first part of that scenario did happen to me. At the launch of the first Jane Blonde book, an LA screenwriter read the book, turned up to the party, and said he'd like to show it around Hollywood.

Oh, my life and stars, the way that sounded! He did as he'd promised, and we got very near with some huge studios but no cigar. The one great thing to come out of that meeting is that Paul has become a very dear friend (and a novelist!). I have indeed spent time with him and his family in LA, and plan on doing it again just as soon as I can; not because the film is out, but because they're great people.

There have been other bites at the filmic cherry too, not just with Jane Blonde, but with my adult books. Producers, including some very big names indeed, have somehow come across my books in UK, US and the Antipodes, and approached me or my agents with various offers. Jane Blonde has already been optioned for film, and other deals are under consideration even as I'm writing.

However, what I've come to understand with both book and film deals, is that there are two plain and simple truths:

One. It's never as much money as you think.

When my first deal was signed, my advance was heralded as NZ's biggest thus far for a children's book. It was £10,000, which would have equated to about \$24k NZD at the time. All the other Jane Blonde advances were between £10k and £12k per book, and I did get up to an advance of £20,000 (which at the time I thought was, you know, fine. Not amazing, but okay).

Now I know what I didn't know: that these figures are double, triple or sometimes quadruple the average advance.

If you do get an advance, it's generally paid in two or three chunks: the first when you sign the contract; the second when you hand in the final manuscript; the third on publication. With traditional publication being slow, this can mean a good couple of years between payments. They're also taxed, and you pay your agent if you have one out of the gross amount.

Then, if you sell enough copies, you might start making royalties. I've sold – well, hard to say as I don't get clear information, and the royalties statements might as well be in Sanskrit for the amount I understand them – but it's probably upward of half a million copies. Well north of that figure, perhaps. My last two half-yearly royalties payments have both amounted to just over £1000. In total, over the life of Jane Blonde (2004 to present, and with a series of 7 books), I've grossed around £100k, give or take, which averages out to about £11k per annum (before income tax and agent commissions which are usually 15-20% of gross payments).

Rather too late, I realised in 2008 that I'd have been very much richer if I'd stayed in my previous job. I'd have been better off working as the most junior administrator in my own department. In fact, that total amount for seven years' worth of publication would have been about the level of my annual salary as Director of T & D.

Would I have been happy doing that, however? I would not. Much as I adored my role, I was ready to leave. Besides, no job on earth could replace the fun I'd had inventing adventures for a sensational spylet, her rapping godmother and a baddy called Copper Knickers. I wouldn't have traded, but I would have liked to have been able to survive on what I earned from being an author. As a solo parent writing full-time, that didn't turn out to be possible.

But what about those lucrative film deals, Jill?

Sorry, folks; I'm going to burst your bubble on those too.

The amount paid out for a film option for one book is around £3 – 6k, or US \$5 – 10k. For that, the producer buys the right to hold your book for a set amount of time, often a year to two years, to see if they can turn it into a film. If it does make it into production, then you'll receive a further, bigger payment, which might be £40k - \$150k.

I believe that of all the films optioned, less than 2% make it into the final film version. As for the number of published books that get optioned in the first place? It's not many. My advice for people who write a book when really they want to write a film, but think a novel will be easier: it's not. Write the film, if that's what your creative heart wants you to do.

I'm not passing this on to pour scorn on the world of storymakers: that's how it is, and I stopped becoming exercised about that a long time ago. Nowadays I actually hoot with laughter when my royalties come in.

I tell you this because I was as guilty as the next author of imagining that a series deal for my books would be end of all financial concerns, hopefully forever, particularly if the films or TV programmes were also commissioned. If I'd understood the full picture, I might have made a few different decisions. Now I DO know the truth, and I am able to make informed choices that are not necessarily what one might expect.

For instance, I turned down film option offers of between USD \$6000 and \$8000 for a couple of my books, having been advised that we could probably get better, and, more to the point, because the figures didn't come close to my naïve anticipation of six figure film deals. Even higher five figure film deals.

With the benefit of ten years' hindsight, I would definitely snap up those contracts, and not just for the sake of adding some bounce to the cash flow (although that would have been a consideration).

What I didn't fully appreciate was the marketing clout that can be added to a book once the words 'Optioned for film' or better yet, 'Soon to be a major movie' are emblazoned on the cover. How many doors it would open. How (and this is the most frustrating element for me as a writer) I might have been learning first-hand to write film-worthy screenplays and therefore accepted as capable of adapting my own creations.

That old twenty-twenty vision is a wonderful thing. It also smarts when you put on those specs.

Moreover, what I now recognise is that producers and studios do not sprinkle options around like confetti. If they offer to take on your book, they are pretty serious about having a stab at bringing the project to fruition. Even if it doesn't work out in the end, they'll give it a damned good try. If they'd like to do that with my book, given the amount of choice they have, then I'm deeply honoured and happy to enter into a partnership, knowing that we're both in it to win. It's back to that validation again. Of all the books in all the world, they chose yours.

The second truth: worrying about the money distracts you from writing.

Perhaps the single biggest lesson I gleaned from all of my experiences is this: the pleasure of connecting with readers and writing, writing, writing is far greater than the short-lived shot in the arm of receiving a royalties payment. Particularly when it's no indication whatsoever of what your future income is going to be (such as when my royalties dropped by \$10000 from one half year to the next).

I know that writing makes me happy, and I can draw on that account any time I like – day or night, weekday or weekend, in quick bursts like a bank raid or with longer, consistent application like paying off a loan. When I focus on the monetary rewards instead of the process of writing, I lose sight of that rich vein of contentment.

Now, I'm not as altruistic as all that. Of course I think I should have earned more. Of course I'm mystified as to why the figures don't seem to stack up. Of course of course of course of course times a million, I want publishers to pay their authors properly, so that they can survive, eat *and* write.

I have an HR background, which has probably been my downfall in becoming an author. I expected publishing to operate like a commercial organisation and to be managed almost as an employee. One of the first things they tell you about in HR School is the pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, whereby you learn that it's impossible to achieve the peak of self-actualisation if you're on the rung below.

If you're on the bottom rung, which is SURVIVAL, it's pretty hard to think about anything another than where your next loaf of bread is coming from. It's nigh on impossible to perform at a higher level until that need is met. Well, guess where an author's remuneration would probably put them on that hierarchy? Yip. Rung one, unless you have other means of support.

So yes, more money would be nice. Necessary, in fact.

But times are a-changing. I now believe that the power is mine.

If I want to take advantage of this new publishing world to make money, then I can make it a goal to earn some money and work towards it (not millions, but sufficient to, say, pay for one holiday a year). The publishing avenue with the biggest margin and therefore the most profit for the author is probably selling ebooks directly from one's own website. No middle men, little or no production costs, no distribution, warehousing and bookseller's payments to make.

That's the way of the money, provided you can get people to your website and sell the books directly to them.

Failing that, selling ebooks via a distributor is a useful way to go about it too. Remember that £1000 cheque I received for my last couple of royalty payments?

Well, while those sales figures were being mysteriously calculated, I loaded four of my books onto Smashwords. Three were priced at \$6.99 USD, and one was given away for free. I promptly forgot all about them. Far from carrying out extensive online marketing campaigns, I hadn't so much as placed or read a review. Less than a year later, I'd made \$1200 in royalties.

Go figure.

I'd simply enjoyed writing those books and then got them out to readers anywhere who might be interested. They had been published by a mainstream publisher before, and I don't think I earned a cent in royalties on those particular titles.

Now, just sitting there, they totted up over a grand with no effort on my behalf. Sure, I'd have to concentrate on marketing a lot more if I wanted to increase the payments to a living wage, or even half a wage, but that wasn't the point for me.

In fact, I challenge you RIGHT NOW to put down this book, find a piece of writing that will pass muster according to tips #1 and #2, and upload it to Smashwords. You'll swear a bit to begin with, but then you will be amazed at the author-friendliness of the whole process.

And do I mind that I'm suggesting you put your books up in competition with mine? Not at all. There's room for us all. There are seven billion people on this planet, and if only 1% of them ever read a book in any format, there would still be room for your book, mine, your friend's, and the forty other books we're each going to write throughout our lifetime.

I've learned my lesson, you see, and it's quite simple.

Me writer. Writers write. Readers read. Happy.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

*Did I actually apologise to you in my last letter? I take it
back. You stink!*

SHOW ME THE MONEY!

*And if you can't, at least now I don't have to rely on you to
get by. I am Midas!*

Jill the Author.

Dear Jill the Author.

Busted. There's not much more we can say really, apart from the fact that producing books does cost an awful lot more than you might imagine. It's quite an involved process.

Still, we'll try to do better.

Jill the Publisher.

SOMETHING TO TRY: APPLY YOUR QUESTIONS FROM TIP # 6 TO A NUMBER OF BOOKS, AND REMEMBER THAT YOUR MOTIVATION FOR PUBLICATION MIGHT BE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO WHICH BOOK YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT. THEN SLOT THE TITLES INTO THE CATEGORIES BELOW.

Trad publisher: Validation

New publisher: Validation

Publishing services provider: Reach readers especially family and friends

E-tailer self-publishing: I have something to say

Self-publish: Make Money

My own categories might look something like this.

Trad publisher: Validation – Jane Blondes 1 – 7

New publisher: Validation – Matilda Peppercorn, Jack BC and School of Ice series, new Jane Blondes (with Pear Jam Books)

Publishing services provider: Reach readers especially family and friends – none here.

E-tailer self-publishing: I have something to say. Writers gotta write!

Self-publish: Make Money – my women's fiction, The Two Miss Parsons, As It Is On Telly, The Most Beautiful Man in the World

Tip #4 Consider What You Can And Can't Do For Yourself

For some years, I harboured certain opinions and views about how publishing could be improved from the author's point of view, but I hadn't really anticipated becoming a publisher myself. Then, two years ago, I accidentally became one.

An earthquake struck Christchurch on the South Island of New Zealand, the country I had called home for eight years. The effect on Christchurch was devastating - nearly 200 people killed (a huge number for a country with a total population of 4 million), and much of the city destroyed or irreparably damaged.

In the midst of it all was one of my clients, Emma. Not realising where she was, I'd send her a manuscript assessment the day after the earthquake. By some miracle, she managed to dig her laptop out from the rubble, somehow find an internet connection in the decimated city, and email me to say that she would definitely look at my assessment. Just as soon as she'd found water, fuel and something with which to clothe and house her children.

I was staggered at her fortitude, and continue to be in awe of the strength and stamina of the good folk of Christchurch where they have suffered ongoing aftershocks and lived in the equivalent of a warzone for months and months after the big quake. It can reduce me to tears even now – but then this is something which definitely warrants a few sympathetic tears.

I was not only impressed at Emma's strength. I was also appalled at my bad timing. We entered into a dialogue which she somehow managed to undertake, during which I grovelled in apology and asked if there was anything I could do to help.

Her answer surprised me, to say the least. "There was that other picture book I sent you," she said. "It's about Curly from Shirley, which is a suburb of Christchurch. I'd love to publish it as a fundraiser for the city."

I considered it for about a nano-second. "Let's do it," I said.

That was on the 27th February 2011. On the 28th, we edited the story. The following day, we got ourselves a wonderful designer in the shape of the brilliantly talented and warm-hearted Cheryl Rowe.

A few days later, I persuaded an author who had previously only illustrated her own award-winning books to have a stab at the illustrations for *Curly*. Oh, and could this mother of three and author-illustrator, Victoria M. Azaro, possibly do them all in ten days?

Within a week or so, we had assembled a team of women ready to take the publishing world by storm, all in the name of aide for Christchurch. Everyone was offering their services for free, and had shuffled around their entire world to make way for this book.

Meanwhile, I'd been calling and emailing, bribing and begging, and generally prostrating myself at the feet of all the major publishers in New Zealand to find someone to produce the book. I was shocked at the hard-nosed business focus displayed by the majority. Some said they'd like to help but couldn't, as they already had 'quake' books for their own. Some said the story didn't fit their list. Some simply refused to look at it.

This was devastating news. I'd galvanised this team into action and turned over the engine on a powerful piece of machinery, only to find that the means to let it run the race weren't going to be made available to us. I was going to have to call Emma and tell her it wasn't going to happen. How could I do that? This was a city in need. A set of people trying their hardest to help.

I cried a little more, and took my poor, long-suffering dog for a walk on a lonely beach just as the sun was rising. It seemed like a sign, and the obvious solution occurred to me. I dashed home filled with enthusiasm. If nobody else was prepared to do it, then I'd do it myself. That afternoon, I set up Pear Jam Books.

Three weeks later, exactly one month to the *hour* from when the earthquake struck the South Island, our book was written, edited, illustrated, designed, printed, available as both an ebook and song written and recorded by talented eight-year-old, Bob Gaudin, and simultaneously launched in Christchurch and Auckland. I don't think any of us had slept for four weeks in a row. I know that I hadn't.

Amazingly, the book went straight into the top ten bestseller list and stayed there for a month, during which time the four-strong team who had put the book together threw themselves into a frenzy of promotion – reading at nurseries and schools, organising hasty local press interviews, even persuading a few national TV programmes to cover the story. It was really a huge success, and one of the things I was most proud of was the fact that *Curly from Shirley, the Christchurch Dog*, was and is a fabulous, fun story for kids anywhere, and could stand on its own four, furry feet in any market.

From those hasty beginnings sprang the embryonic publishing company, Pear Jam Books. I decided to build on those foundations by taking on wonderful books by my clients that, for no good reason, had not reached publication before. And then ... well, the learning process began in earnest.

You see, I imagined that with the *Curly* experience, I'd discovered what I didn't know about publishing.

I certainly bumped into an amazing revelation on an hourly basis, so that I spent much of that month shaking my head in disbelief, either at the genius of Victoria's illustrations or Cheryl's storyboarding, or the strange bookselling decisions made by major stores (including, inexplicably, the news that 'Quake books are only sold in the quake zone', which is rather like taking coals to Newcastle once the mine-shafts have all collapsed).

I learned so much and managed to drive it along so enthusiastically that I even won an award for it later that year: Next NZ Woman of the Year for Arts and Culture.

You'd imagine, then, that I'd probably sucked up all the information I could ever need to publish a few books.

Not so.

What I hadn't reckoned on was the fact that Curly was a 'cause' book. I didn't realise how much more difficult it would be to get interest – among media, booksellers and purchasers alike – without that 'good cause' label attached.

Our wee doggy sold a couple of thousand copies very quickly; with the new books it was hard to shift a few dozen. Nearly everyone who had worked on Curly had offered their services free of charge for the cause; when they re-instated their usual fees, production costs were suddenly sky-high. While booksellers had been content to stock the Christchurch Dog at short notice and pile it high, they now reverted to requiring three month lead times and sixty day payment terms.

To top it all, there were certain parts of the process that I was happy to lead, do myself, or at least coordinate when dealing with Curly from Shirley, but with several titles to juggle, I discovered that there were certain skills in which I was sadly lacking, notably sales and managing the accounts.

Both rather crucial in publishing, it turns out.

My bad.

I thought – hoped, perhaps - that the Curly from Shirley experience had taught me everything I needed to know about publishing. What I'd actually had, in effect, was the equivalent to the Jane Blonde experience: it worked like a dream from the get-go, and consequently created an unrealistic impression of the inner-workings of a publishing house, so that my assumptions were based on shaky foundations.

For sure, I knew a huge amount more about publishing than your average author and was able to use that to generate a level of success in my new company, but there were still large gaps in my knowledge.

This was all exacerbated by the fact that my background as an author and commitment to the writers in Pear Jam Books meant that I wanted to do everything differently to how it had previously been done in publishing, which didn't go down too well within the established industry. Even if I was right ...

Pear Jam has survived, amazingly – by the skin of its teeth and mine, I should add, and any number of other unexplained and disturbing medical emergencies which one can only imagine are stress-related. But here is the point of my relating this curly dog's tale to you.

I thought I knew what I didn't know, when in fact, I didn't know what I didn't know. When I was immersed in the fall-out from what I didn't know (printers to pay, authors to placate, daughters to remember to pick up from school), it became painfully apparent how much I still had to learn.

And most of what I had to learn was about myself.

What I have surmised about myself as a publisher over the last couple of years is very much along the lines of what I've been asking you to consider in your own wish to be published.

Why do I publish books?

Because I love to:

Coach the author through the writing process;

Edit and finesse the book to turn it into the best version of itself it can possibly be;

Contribute to and sign-off on the design process; and

Make a new author's dreams come true by seeing their book come to life.

Basically, I love publishing books for the same reasons I love writing books – for validation of the book, artistic expression, and producing a book that engages directly with its audience.

What I do not love about publishing includes:

Taking orders for books and posting them out;

Selling books into bricks-and-mortar booksellers;

Nailing down all the financial aspects of it such as chasing booksellers for payments and negotiating discounts and so on

Anything to do with social media

In all honesty, I would not have been able to identify any of the whys and wherefores of becoming a publisher two years ago; nor would I have been in a position to consider whether or not I'd be able to do these things myself without having tried them. Truth be told, I'm a fairly practical person and can turn my hand to most things if I have a mind to.

The problems bubble up whenever I don't have a mind to. And what it boils down to, for me, is that I love the early stages of the publishing process (author and book development) and the latter stages of it (reader engagement and author contact). I can take or leave – and given the choice would probably leave – the intermediate links in the chain: distribution, sales, financial management and online marketing. When you consider that these are major parts of the publishing process, you can imagine that the lessons I've learned over the last couple of years have not been administered with kid gloves. Rather, they've been applied with hefty swipes of a cricket bat, or, occasionally, electrodes to the temples.

What I'm suggesting, then, is that you are realistic about your resources and capabilities – both positively and negatively. By finding out what you don't know about publishing, you may discover that it's very helpful to be a whizz on the computer, for instance. If you have that kind of brain, a Zuckerman curiosity for coding, then you may hold a significant advantage in the world of ebooks and internet marketing. If you're already Zuckerman II, that's great. Use it.

If you're not yet at that level but you suspect that you could be, and – here's the key – you're motivated to develop in this direction, then you might take the time to learn about it. For instance, covers and book internals are often put together and formatted using InDesign software. If you have that bent you could investigate that package. You could learn to code for basic programming through **www.code.org**. You might even discover a new, simpler way to convert your Word documents to epub files and initiate yet another revolution in the world of ebook production.

If, however, you're not that way inclined at all, then don't kid yourself that you'll get around to it.

Back to my HR background. Employers find that when they try to push colleagues outside their comfort zone without the individual really wanting to make the leap, they actually cause the person to re-trench and immerse themselves more fully within the area they felt they could do without challenge.

This is a classic issue in the promotion of high-performing technical staff, for example. Often the ‘prize’ granted to employees who’ve done well in their technical specialism is to promote them to manager, with little or no consideration for how great their management skills are or are ever likely to be (and “Oh, we’ll just send them to HR for a bit of training” won’t work, I promise you). The result is that the technical specialist no longer feels capable in their role, and rather than striving to learn new skills, they disappear into their previous skill-set and fail to do either job satisfactorily.

Hence the need to know whether you’re genuinely motivated to pick up this new skill. If you’re not, all you will do is let it slide further and further down your priority list while you concentrate on the stuff you do know how to do – editing, say, or wholesale re-writes of the beginning ... the middle ... the end ... Your book will probably never even get written, let alone published.

On the other side of the coin, however, you should be positive about your capabilities, even if they are not skills that are usually attributed to authors. Remember: now you're publishing, not writing. The publishing process is simply a production line into which your existing skills might fit very well. If you can design websites, knit hilarious merchandise, or you already work in PR albeit in a different industry, then you can utilise any of these skills in the production of your book. It might even be your USP – your unique selling proposition that differentiates you and your books from the rest of the market.

In fact, if you've got such skills, don't just use them. Improve them. Expend some time and energy and perhaps even a little money on finding out how to do carry out these techniques properly, within the publishing industry.

This will often be a question of finding out what you don't know: in PR, discovering how books reach reviewers, how authors appear on TV, readings happening in libraries; in website design, what is an author trying to achieve with their website that might be different to a straight sales site; for knitters of funky toys to go with characters, what are the outlets and do they include bookshops, and what are people going to be prepared to pay for your creation which took up four weeks of your time, nineteen balls of mohair and a sack and a half of kapok?

If you enjoy these activities anyway, you may find you garner as much enjoyment from this angle of your publishing journey as from your writing.

I'm a trainer and public speaker and love performing, for instance, so my passion for writing and talking are fairly balanced. It's no hardship for me to rustle up an after dinner speech, whereas you might prefer to swallow the toothpicks sideways rather than stand up in front of audience.

You, on the other hand, might be overjoyed to test all the recipes for your cupcake fairy fantasy in a Great Bookish Bake-Off, and set up an online cake-with-book order company. I will eat them, very happily, but never, ever, ever ever bake them myself – so do send me some if you go in this direction.

It gets better than that, too. Better than you loving not one, but two parts of the publishing process – writing and Skill X. If there's something you discover you can do effortlessly, enjoyably and without taking your eye off the ball of getting you own books out, you might even be able to help others through their publishing journey. You could generate a whole new business in this industry which is spawning a thousand different sub-industries.

Who would ever have thought that you could set up a company organising someone's Tweets for them? You can. You could also be selling their Tweety-Birds for them; filming their twittery book trailer for them; negotiating the film deal for the motion movie extended version of the book trailer for them ...

There are many, many areas where someone else's lack of interest or capability could create an opening for you. And as it's such an online world these days, you could put the wheels in motion relatively easily (provided you can do that sort of stuff, or know someone who can).

As long as you don't get too carried away, of course. If you identify your strengths and weaknesses early on, you'll have far more opportunity to marshal your time and resources to allow you to continue with your main task.

Don't forget. You have another book to write.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

*Do you know what? I actually feel a lot better, knowing
that you don't know everything.*

That makes you just human, like me.

*Just to be sure, though – if my book is published by you,
you'll do all of this anyway, won't you? Websites and promotion
and all that nonsense.*

Jill the Author ☺

Dear Jill the Author,

We certainly are human. Fallible.

As an organisation we might be rather slow to change, at times, and not necessarily prepared to admit to our faults. That's what most businesses are like, I suppose.

As individuals within the organisation, however, we're most definitely people with lives and problems and opinions of our own. Sometimes we even Tweet them!

In answer to your question: yes, we'll help with websites and promotion and the like, but it's definitely not nonsense, and we probably won't be able to assist as much as you might imagine. It's great when you're prepared to contribute yourself.

I hesitate to say it, but are we possibly starting to understand each other?

Jill the Publisher 😊😊

Dear Jill the P – well, don't push it. I'm not sure I'm completely over the money issue. But ... well, you're a lot more like me than I thought. Guess I didn't know what I didn't know. Jx

SOMETHING TO TRY: FIND OUT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT PUBLISHING. WRITE OUT EACH STEP, AND RATE YOURSELF ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN FOR EACH ACTIVITY.

(IF YOU'RE STUCK ON WHAT THOSE ACTIVITIES ARE, I RUN AN ONLINE SIX MONTH COACHING PROGRAMME TAKING YOU THROUGH EVERY STEP OF THE PROCESS IN WEEKLY BITES

(www.jillmarshallauthoracademy.com).

THEN, FOR EVERYTHING WHICH SCORES THREE AND UNDER, ADMIT DEFEAT AND GET HELP.

FOR FOUR TO SEVEN, CONSIDER HOW MOTIVATED YOU ARE TO UPSKILL.

FOR EIGHT TO TEN, CONSIDER HELPING OTHERS IN THIS AREA (THOSE WHO ARE AT THREE AND UNDER)

Tip #3 Employ Worthy People To Help

“I keep six honest serving men;

They taught me all I knew.

Their names are What and Why and When,

And How and Where and Who.”

Most people know this quotation from the inestimable Rudyard Kipling. I use it myself in one of my online programmes to help picture book writers figure out why their verse isn't working.

The words are useful reminders of an approach we could take throughout life: seeking clarification; making sure we've got our facts straight; avoiding assumption as a foundation for making decisions (as I am wont to do, with a cavalier toss of the head and the bold statement of “Well, it worked okay last time.”)

I've mentioned my assumption-blindness before, and I'll reiterate it here as I launch into this next tip about finding people to do the things that you can't do yourself, as highlighted in the previous chapter. I'm a very trusting person, with ridiculous levels of optimism even in the face of adversity, and an over-riding belief that everything will work out in the end – despite all evidence to the contrary.

One day not so long ago, I was chatting with a colleague in my home office when the gas company turned up to switch off the supply. This was without warning and incredibly unjust, for various reasons that I won't go into. I was in such a state of disbelief, however, that I couldn't do much more than point a shaky finger towards the gas meter, then reel back along the corridor to resume my conversation. My colleague had heard the entire exchange, and being immensely kind, she 1) offered to help me out financially (and I knew she was not wealthy, as she works in publishing!) and 2) quietly packed up her bag, gave me her phone number, and left me alone so that I could deal with it.

Almost immediately there was a knock at the door. My next appointment – a client. Haggard and swallowing back tears, I led her to the office only to hear yet another person pounding thunderously on the door I'd just closed. Without thinking, I opened it.

This time it was the electricity guy, come to cut off the electricity supply. Both utilities fell under the same supplier, which is why it should have occurred to me not to answer when he knocked. In a daze, I ushered him in the other direction towards the electricity meter, deciding on the spot that it wasn't worth getting into a debate with the poor man. What a horrible job, having to deliver such awful news (and it was the first time it was delivered, as I'd received no warning).

Back to the client I staggered. Again, she'd overheard everything that was going on, and was kindness itself in helping me calm down, and then rearranging our appointment so that I didn't have to try to gather my thoughts together with all the chaos going on around me.

Lights and heating and computers were turning off, hot water turned ice cold in seconds (it was the coldest two weeks of the year in deepest mid-winter), and a thousand bitter realisations collided in my poor beleaguered brain. For a start, I couldn't use the phone to call the utilities company because the power was off, nor use the internet to attempt to resolve the issue for the same reason.

I ushered the author out of the door, physically shaking from head to toe, and then set about explaining what had happened to my daughter. She was at home (in the hot shower turned cold) as I'd just had to remove her from her school due to an ongoing bullying issue. In her own private hell, she did her best to comfort me and offer me some reassurance that it would all be okay.

That afternoon, we found our way to a hardware store, stocked up on candles and a tiny camping stove, and for the next two weeks that's how we lived – camped out like pioneer settlers to the extent that our body clocks began to match daylight hours, as we couldn't do anything once it went dark besides huddle in our beds to keep warm and try to read by candlelight.

We look back now and laugh, largely because of what occurred the next day, once the stark reality of literally being powerless had set in. Unable to stand another moment in this cold, unwelcoming home that I felt somehow was trying to punish me, I summoned my daughter, gathered up the dog, and set off for a local park. Surprisingly, beyond our cabin walls it was a sunny, clear day. At the park, other dogs were frolicking; children cavorted on the climbing frame; healthy Aucklanders were jogging by, greeting us cheerily as Kiwis do.

We circumnavigated the park and then availed ourselves of a bench. The dog found a stick; I threw it. He failed to bring it back, so I ran after it myself and played stick with my teenage daughter instead. Our canine friend, meanwhile, chose the moment to drag himself along the grass with his back legs splayed in a slightly obscene movement that we know as ‘swimming’. We curled up with laughter for a while, then sat contentedly, side by side, watching our dog make a mutley fool of himself in public.

After a while, I turned to my daughter. “Do you know what, darling? It’s so irritating,” I said. “I really do find it incredibly hard to stay depressed these days.”

It wasn't until she burst out laughing that I realised how fatuous that sounded. It was my own little Edina from Ab Fab moment, and my Saffy was rolling around on a park bench, howling with laughter at my expense. I sniggered with her.

And then I thought (though I kept it to myself) how astonishing it was that we could be guffawing on a grassy slope less than twenty four hours after our home and workplace had been so savagely violated. I can't pretend that every moment from then on was as Pollyanna as this, but it certainly helped me to keep going, and eventually everything did turn around for the better.

However, that example shows the upside of being generally upbeat about life, even when times are outrageously hard. Flip the coin, and you see the darker elements of that cheery optimism and faith.

Assumption.

I have made, and continue to make, a series of assumptions that are founded on this optimism. They include:

Other people have your best interests at heart;

Most people are nice;

Normal people generally think in the same way as other normal people;

Most people are ‘normal’, or at least my version of it – i.e., most people are like me;

If you step out confidently, you’ll get there;

Things always work out in the end.

Now, while I will continue to operate in this way for the rest of my days – it’s my nature, when all’s said and done – I have now learned to temper these assumptions with a little more healthy cynicism. I say a ‘little more’ because that’s the most cynicism I want to have: just enough to protect me and mine from harm, but not so much that it destroys my fundamental faith in humanity.

Here’s how I might adapt those statements with Mr Kipling’s serving men, in order to accommodate some caution:

Other people may have your best interests at heart, but it’s more likely they’ll have their own best interests at heart. In that case, HOW do I make this a win-win situation where we serve both our interests?

Most people are nice, but if they work for a business they have to do what is required by that business. WHAT is required by their business?

Normal people generally think in the same way as other normal people. WHICH people operate with the same values as the people I like?

Most people are 'normal', or at least my version of it – i.e., most people are like me. WHO are the people like me, and what do I do about the ones who aren't?

If you step out confidently, you'll get there. WHERE is 'there'? Put some markers in the ground.

Things always work out in the end. WHEN is the end? Put some markers in the ground.

Moreover, WHY am I telling you all this? WHAT is my point, and WHEN am I going to get there?

Now.

I mention all of the above because I want you to identify worthy people and services to help you carry out the pieces of the publishing process that you have highlighted as 1 – 3 on the capability scale in the last chapter. This might be anyone from an individual editor or web designer, to one of those companies that can manage the whole gamut of publishing services for you and spit a dozen books into your hand, just before you head off to Billy's 21st birthday party.

It helps to employ other people to do what you really can't do, won't do, or don't even know that you need to do. Someone who knows what they're doing in this incredibly fast-changing world could prove to be the difference between completing and publishing your book, and watching that train leave the station without you.

A specialist who is expert in their niche is generally going to take a fraction of the time and energy you would expend, and will probably produce a better result.

They'll also have saved you from being abandoned by your loved ones as you rant, tear out your hair and blame everyone but yourself for your inability to learn HTML in two days, just to set up your own website in order to save you a few bob. They will refer to it in family legend as 'the lost weekend'; you'll twitch slightly and shudder, before returning to the conversation with a rictus grin and glassy eyes ...

Don't put yourself through it. You can be saved! Identify what it is you know you need, find someone who does just that, and then pay them to do it. That is one of the downsides, of course: unless you can set up some kind of barter system, you are more than likely going to have to part with some cash to employ another person or set of people to fill some of the gaps for you.

If you do manage to trade skills and do it on the cheap, then that's great. Bear in mind, though, that generally when someone is doing you a favour, they have to put you to the back of the queue behind the paying clients. I've often found that when I've entered into a quid pro quo arrangement, or a friend has offered to help out, that it eventually leads to frustration as you can't push them to achieve the outcome according to your criteria of WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW.

More than likely, you'll end up finding another WHO, and then paying them. That's only right, to my mind. It fully recognises others' value, and allows you to get on with your own money-making specialism, whatever that may be. And it keeps the economy on the move.

That said, I would strongly advise that you apply that spoonful of cynicism, and ask questions before you embroil yourself in a business relationship to meet your goals.

You do need to be careful.

Don't simply believe that an 'expert' is truly as expert as they say they are. They may be just a little more expert than you are, and as you don't know what you don't know, that could actually cause you more problems than it solves.

It can certainly be the case that it doesn't achieve what you desired, and has left you financially worse off into the dreadful bargain. My own particular bete noir in the publishing process, for instance, has been my ability to drive people to my websites. For years now, I've had glorious websites with full interactivity and bright Technicolor, and nobody visiting them. On three different occasions, I've parted with at least a grand or two, and often much more, to help me get more people to my sites:

The first was when I tried to get a more commercial feel to www.jillmarshallbooks.com, and shelled out \$7000 to get a nicely designed website with expert ‘tags’ and what have you. It turned out to be very static and hard to manage, and the lengthy design process caused me to miss the launch of two books so that I had no web presence at a critical time. In hindsight, I needed to set the deadlines (WHEN), outline WHY it needed to be in these timescales, and ask for some guarantees that WHAT I wanted to achieve (more contact with fans) would become possible because of this company’s expertise. I might also have considered the fact that I was the first author they’d worked with.

The second attempt was in shepherding clients to my consultancy and training site, now www.jillmarshallauthoracademy.com. A company who were ‘expert’ in search engine optimisation, especially Google listings, took over \$1000 from me to set up statistics, the right keywords and so on. I didn’t have a single client visit the site as a result, and when I tried to follow up with the company a few months later, they’d disappeared.

Third one's a charm, huh? I had tried to automate my online training delivery in the past, which had led to a series of problems with clients and cost me business. I appointed a specialist to rectify the situation, but because I didn't know what I didn't know, I wasn't really able to ask the right questions and get the correct solution set up. Though both parties set out with the best intentions, I didn't get WHAT I needed, and the supplier felt short-changed and frustrated by my lack of knowledge. Meanwhile, my training automation is no further on ...

With my 20/20 gogs on, the questions I might have asked each party are: WHO else have you done this for? WHERE can I see the evidence? WHAT results have you recorded? WHEN do you expect payment? WHY do you want to do this for me? HOW are we going to work together to meet our mutual needs?

In this vein, I would be especially cautious about the plethora of companies who offer to help you publish your book. Some of these, though not all, have spotted a growth market and decided to hitch their wagon to it. Such is the way of commerce.

They're not all cowboys of course. They might well provide a number of the products and services they promise: covers, a quick edit, a small print run, 'marketing' by displaying your book on their website or similar.

However, because new authors don't know what they don't know (i.e. what publishers know – that this part of the process is just the beginning) you willingly believe them and hand over the money. Then you end up on a slush pile again, only this time it's all your own printed books filling up your garage, taunting you every time you get out the car. You tried, those boxes will sneer.

But you didn't realise that getting them from garage to bookstore is the really difficult part (and putting a box in the boot won't necessarily help).

Do check the company's credentials, against a backdrop of industry information.

Perhaps the most important issue would be to check up on their own motivation for being in this industry, whichever business stream it may be. If it aligns with your own, then you may have found a great working partner.

For instance, if you want to share a family history with a few of your relatives, and the company you go to specialises in history and gift books, then that would be a good match.

If you want to reach a readership with the novel you have slaved over for a decade, then that same company will not be able to provide what you want, no matter how much they tell you that they can. A novel needs different editing, paper quality, covers, font size and type, industry contacts, marketing ... different *everything*, in fact.

In this case, you need alternative assistance – and you may not need it all. If you know what you don't know, you can identify more clearly the areas in which you definitely need help.

The question I would most like to pose if I could jump in a time machine would be to myself, and it would be this: WHY do you think you need this?

If the answer were to be that I'd heard it from an 'expert'; I'd seen one of those successful authors on TV and this was how they'd done it, apparently; I'd been just too afraid to try it for myself even though I suspected I probably could, or because my mate had offered me a great deal ... in any of those situations, I would tell my former self to wait a while, think on it, and then maybe see if I could do it myself. If, indeed, it needed to be done at all.

Of course, if the answer vacillated between "I simply can't do it myself" and "I could do it myself but it would take me forever and cause me to age prematurely", then the answer would be to find someone to help.

To my great delight, in sharp contrast to my briefcase full of files marked 'Bad choices', I have a team of wonderful people around me who have exactly the same motivation as I do: to create wonderful books, connect authors and readers, and reward the 'talent'.

Every single one is a book lover and has a long history of working in the publishing industry so that they, too, have experienced enough of the wrong type of publisher to know what they want to reach for in the new publishing world. Some of the technical supporters, such as my superb web designer, are authors themselves, and therefore understand my needs and desires from all angles.

I'm incredibly lucky to have them on board – VPs and designers and website managers and ebook converters, and, of course, the authors and illustrators themselves – and that more than makes up for the trail of disasters I've accumulated during my publishing career as both author and publisher.

So how do you find someone similar to help?

Ask questions. Find synergies. Set boundaries and expectations.

Then employ others in good faith, with a wee dollop of scepticism that just encourages you to keep a closer eye on the process than the supplier might fully appreciate.

Then let them get on with it to the best of their ability,
while you apply yourself to what you do to the best of your ability,
and write, write, write.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

Hey, I'm starting to see something.

I've forked out all this cash for other people to do things that I thought I couldn't do myself, and the amount I've paid out far outweighs the amount I've earned from writing. This has made me so very, yea verily very mad over the years, and yet still I've kept on, even having had my power cut off.

But that's the key, isn't it? Power. Every time I've handed money over to someone claiming to be an expert, I've handed them my power. Every time I've left it to you to get on with it on my behalf, I've handed you my power.

There has to be a middle way, where I keep my power. And maybe I let you have your power too. For instance, if I'd been more amenable to some of the things you were trying to arrange, I might not have had to plunder my savings to the same extent. And my earnings might have been higher!

I'm going to have to think about this one. But I'm starting to see the light ...

Jill the Thinker

Dear Jill the Author/Thinker,

Agreed. I'm starting to consider all this too.

What I would observe is that we are expert in many of these areas, if not all, and should be the people supplying these services to you, the author. I'm sure this is the way many publishers will go.

We've been very worried about losing that power, of course, so we may have resisted change for longer than was wise

...

It's a possibility that what we need to do is meet halfway. If we'd done that more readily in the past, rather than snuffing out your power and being somewhat smug about ours, then maybe our relationship could have been more mutually beneficial.

Hopefully it still can be.

Yours thoughtfully,

Jill the Publisher

SOMETHING TO TRY: TAKE YOUR ITEMS SCORING 1-3 FROM THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, LIST OUT WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED HELP WITH, AND SLOT THEM INTO THE LISTS BELOW AS PER MY EXAMPLE.

Trad publisher: Validation, Jane Blonde publishers. Need to add to **website**

New publisher: Validation, new series. Need the same site, and add **fan/database management**

Publishing services provider: Reach readers especially family and friends – nothing here. Yay!

E-tailer self-publishing: I have something to say. **Need editor and designer.**

Self-publish: Make Money – **Add to website**

Tip # 2 Think Like A Publisher

In the old days, three or four years ago, my penultimate tip before I reached the biggest at #1 was always this: ‘Don’t give up the day job.’ You’ve seen what disasters ensued when I gave up the equivalent of a day job, imagining that I could support myself by writing full-time.

In recent months, however, I’ve adjusted my thinking to incorporate the increased opportunities to make a living through books. You probably won’t make a fortune, as we may fondly dream, but you could generate some income, some resources, that enable you to carry on writing and doing what you love.

What I’m about to tell you has been the most critical paradigm shift in understanding in the whole of my writing career. Now that I’ve articulated it, at least to myself in the confines of my own home, it seems so glaringly obvious that I can hardly believe I haven’t spotted it way before this.

Like so many authors, however, I found myself on a yellow-brick path that seemed to be leading towards Oz. With my own inability to follow instructions, I stumbled into the field of poppies. Bedazzled by sparkly side-tracks that whispered of fame, fortune and celebrity, and chivvied along by my constant confidence that I could do a better job myself, I skipped enthusiastically along a number of tangents. Had I seen my life as an author mapped out as a plot in one of the stories I assess, I'd have been straight in there with the red pen. "No, you fool! Go back! Tangents and red herrings do not create a strong storyline or lead to a satisfying conclusion. Your readers will be mystified and not a little irritated. Stick to the path, young one. Okay, middle-aged one. Stick to the path!"

And if the version of me with the red pen was also the oracle who sang out the prophecy in the prologue, I would have uttered the following words of wisdom:

Do not write to create a lifestyle. Create a lifestyle in order to write.

If I were being entirely new age and metaphysical about it, I might add:

Do not write to create a lifestyle and thus manifest all that your heart desires.

Create the lifestyle that allows you to write, and all your heart desires will then manifest.

As I'm still waiting to see if the manifestation of my heart's desires (and my bank manager's) actually pans out, I'm hoping that the second couplet is prophetic. Without a moment's hesitation, however, I can assure you that the first version of this statement is absolutely true.

When I first began writing, it was to assuage the hunger in my creative brain, to soothe the ache in my heart that told me there was something missing in my life. I wrote in order to write. I wrote with fervour and dedication, and an excitement that came from giving into a cry from within that had been poking at my solar plexus for years, if not decades.

Then came the book deals, and for a while the fact that I was required to keep writing more books by someone else, including readers and fans, just fuelled the passion. During those years, I was on fire, and my lifestyle of assessing manuscripts, managing rentals and running occasional writing courses supported me sufficiently that I could thoroughly enjoy myself, playing on a daily basis with all my new friends. It led to more book deals, and more. The more I wrote, the more I wrote.

Then came that pivotal moment when I switched. I'd made it, I decided, and now I wanted the writing to provide the lifestyle. Where were the millions of dollars? The fancy cars; the homes between which I would 'divide my time'; the jet-setting, fan-greeting, holidaying-while-touring globe-trotting? I didn't doubt that I deserved it. I still don't doubt that I deserved it.

What I didn't foresee, however, was that in the very act of focussing on the reward rather than the writing, I turned being an author into a job.

And it was a job for which I wasn't very well paid or even respected. It was the kind of job where I could see the bosses raking in the goodies on the broken back of my slave labour. The kind of job, frankly, that I would have advised anyone against taking in my previous days as an HR director.

Even worse was the fact that my writing, my beloved books – my babies - became bargaining tools. I've witnessed softer stances during the full-blown trade union disputes that I've negotiated in engineering companies. Give me what I want, or I won't give you what you want. You obviously don't understand, so take it or leave it, because I'm ready to walk. This type of tactic, from both sides of the table.

Please be aware that I am not suggesting for a moment that you give way on all your rights as an author in order to maintain a publishing deal. I'm more than willing to negotiate with big six publishing companies, particularly since I became a publisher, but there are certain rights that I will never again sign away.

In future, I will not put my signature to any contract in which I:

Receive royalties of only 10% of net receipts, net proceeds, profits, RRP or any other calculation of monies made from selling my books. I created it, and there is no way I am earning less from it than the driver who picked up a pallet at the printers (who also made a pile) and drove it to a warehouse on a retail park. Just no, okay?

Hand over my **digital rights, merchandising rights, TV and film rights** willy-nilly, and any other method of preventing me from getting a fair share of the ebook sales, when I know first-hand how easy it is to take the edited manuscript and format it in epub and mobi for sale by any e-tailer or my own e-commerce site.

Agree to sell world rights, so that any advances for sales to other territories of my book, books, or series of books are swallowed up by the publishing company, and I don't see a cent of it ...

Allow the publishing company to keep the rights to my book ad infinitum, or until they're out of print, when they've done nothing to promote and work with a title for years but are not permitting me to get on and do it myself. It's two or three years and then let's look at it again, in my view. Maximum.

So no, do not give in, Citizen Author. Stand tall. Stand together.

On the other hand, don't chain yourself to the railings over your rights, either. Sure, the days in which the publisher would cast an eye over a list of demands such as mine, snort a little, and then shout, "Next!" are probably disappearing, but they're not gone yet. And one thing I've discovered as a publisher myself is that you really, really have to like the person you're going to be working with in order to make the most of the relationship and the books. If said person is a pain in the proverbial before you've even signed them up, then just imagine what they're going to be like once they think they deserve the big-time. It's one thing to be a squeaky door to get some attention when you haven't heard from anyone in nine months; it's quite another to rip the door off its hinges and beat someone across the head with it.

Be careful. I'm just saying.

In fact, remember the screenwriter who discovered Jane Blonde in Auckland and touted my book around Hollywood? A screenwriter of thirty years, with a successful track record and a passion for film-making, he was starting to find the industry a little testing. Then the screenwriters went on strike. Far from improving matters for the majority, it made many of the producers dig their heels in. You want to play hard ball? We'll show you hard ball, is what they seemed to say. After three decades of making it in LA, my friend threw in the towel last year, and has now gone into real estate.

There are a couple of lessons in this, I feel.

Firstly, do be sure that you're really as important as you think you are before you start rocking boats.

Secondly, know what your limits are. At some point, if you walk away from it all, you'll want to feel that you acted with integrity, and gave it everything you had.

Now, before you decide to walk away from it all RIGHT NOW, with all this depressing news, let me reassure you that my own experiences of penury, powerlessness and pointless table-thumping were a few years ago. Only a few, but long enough for the publishing world to have tilted on its axis, and thankfully in the direction of the author.

Choices.

That's what you have that I didn't have just thirty six months ago.

Choices, flexibility and room to manoeuvre.

By now, you've had the chance to write and polish your book, consider what type of author you want to be, identify why you wish to be published, and run through the list of publisher activities to decide which you should manage personally and which you should hand off to someone more qualified. Choices, see!

If, after all that, you still wish to press on and get your book published by any or all of the methodologies we've covered here, then you need to hunker down into the nitty gritty of it all, and start to think like a publisher.

And that means thinking of it as a business. Preferably a business that will create the lifestyle to support your writing.

Thinking of publishing in purely business terms is probably where I fall down. I'm not a very good publisher, from that point of view, and I've no doubt that several of my suppliers and the people I've struggled to pay would agree with me. I don't – can't - think of it as a money-making machine. I don't much care about all the processes beyond the great-book-well-written appearing in some format or other, along with a beaming smile on the author's face. Apart from seeing a beaming smile appearing on the reader's face.

Consequently I don't manage some of those processes terribly well, and I can't be hard-nosed about it all despite my heavily commercial bent. As I'm spectacularly lax at invoicing and chasing money, I've been unable to afford support and have found myself paying out of my own meagre income to attempt to keep my promises to authors.

Then my lights go out.

Having confessed my failures, however, I would also say that in some ways, I'm a very good publisher.

I'm a publisher for the right reasons: because I love books and story; because I love their creators and seeing them develop to their full potential; because I love getting books in front of readers who can adore them, learn from them, have fun with them; because I love being an author, and I know what it means to have to write. My heart's in it. In fact, I'm in it, heart and soul, boots and all. Whatever happens with my publishing company in the future, I will be proud to know that I started it for the right reasons, and I stuck with it for those same reasons.

I've suffered for them, too, and it's from my experiences, for good or ill, that you can find your own way. Without too much suffering – none, I hope – you can benefit from what I've learned and try to think like a publisher. A good one. A publisher that treats it like a business instead of a sort of foster-home for authors and illustrators.

In doing so, you can find ways to follow your dream according to what motivates you to be published in the first place.

Product

Whatever route you want to take, make sure you have the very best finished product that you can provide.

Apologies for talking about your beloved book as a ‘product’, or even in this digital age as ‘content’ - but to a business-focussed publisher, that’s what it is. The more profit-oriented publishers could be selling pencil sharpeners, garden forks, or SIM cards and be getting as much pleasure – and profit – from it. It’s not a coincidence that when the publishing directors of two of my publishing houses left, they were replaced by managers from the magazine world and the toy industry, respectively.

Products. Your book has to be shinier, more enticing, cheaper-to-buy and more necessary to replace than the next ‘product’ on the shelf.

If you’re aiming for ‘validation’ through a trade or Big Six publisher, you’re going to want to make it abundantly clear that you’ve thought of all this in advance, and you know your ‘product’ is going to withstand scrutiny at this level.

It’s not just a matter, therefore, of you believing that it’s as good as that other book that’s huge at the moment. It really, genuinely has to be as good, if not better, and even more advantageous if it starts a new trend instead of tail-gating one that’s on the wane.

People

I have absolute faith in every single one of my authors' books and in the writers themselves, because I know that in the wider world there are going to be legions of readers who adore their creations. In supporting them to outrageous levels, I sometimes stick my neck out – and my cheque book – and it doesn't always pay off. Because we're very closely connected, I find it hard to disappoint people and will overcommit rather than let them down. In this way, I have been known to stretch resources too thin, and then the cracks begin to show.

Furthermore, many of the authors in Pear Jam are also my friends of many years, and if we've had disagreements (usually because they've reached that 'switch' point that I reached in 2008, of wanting success over writing) it has resulted in me losing a buddy as well as a writer. You know what they say about mixing business and pleasure. It's sometimes hard to separate the author from the person, even when they behave in different ways in the two roles, and I'm sure it's equally difficult for the author to separate the publisher from the friend. I've inadvertently offended editors and publishing colleagues of whom I was very fond because I took a swipe at the company overall, not really thinking through how this might affect them personally.

Overall I'd probably recommend that you retain a professional regard for the people you work with. Of course, you can and should still be friendly, open and honest. Go for a drink with them after 'work'.

But do consider what the fallout is going to be if your closest friend of twenty five years agrees to do your social media for you, and then fails to meet a deadline. At some point, the tightrope walker may fall off, and if your publishing career doesn't take off as planned, it might be a high price to pay.

Profit

Think in terms of profit margins, unit cost of production, percentages to devote to marketing and so on:

The smallest margin is in the print book because of the high cost of production, distribution and bookseller payments. You are also limited by the number printed and the amount that you can sell.

The biggest is in ebooks, which may have cost you nothing to put together and sell online, and are not affected by the length of the book or the number of colours used.

In the middle lies audio, which can cost a fair amount to produce depending on the length of the reading and the profile of the actor used, but with audios available in download rather than produced as CDs, the margins can be larger.

Apps, audio and games are interesting as they may require a higher up-front investment to produce, but once available they have limitless potential and can therefore be sold at lower prices to attract higher sales.

Portfolio

Once you've identified the profit margins and so on, you can consider your portfolio overall. As with any broker, you're going to want to spread the risk to give some of your wild cards a shot at success, while avoiding the temptation to plough the whole of your investment into one hedge fund.

To that end, you might consider an app to be high risk as it can cost a lot to develop, but if you're confident that your social media skills and relationship with Apple will make it work, then it becomes lower risk.

Similarly, aiming to get a blockbuster trilogy published by a mainstream publisher is not going to involve any financial input (other than paying for editors, perhaps); however, you'll have to accept that this strategy is longer term, and may pay out in five years rather than one, or possibly never at all. If, in the meantime, you're chucking out hotcake hot-sex novellas that sell at \$2.99 a pop but in their thousands, and RIGHT NOW, then you're putting your literary eggs in different baskets and creating a lifestyle that allows you to write.

Print

This is your hot tip from a publisher – a little insider trading, if you like. It might sound odd, but if you're publishing for anything other than personal purposes, then I would strongly advise that you wait a while before printing your books.

A loooooong while.

Try them for size as ebooks first, or some other format (chapters for download, PDF pamphlets, video clips of you reading aloud if necessary!).

When you're convinced that you have enough demand to warrant going to print, then and only then should you head down that route.

Recently, I was introduced to the concept of 'the Basildon path'. During the formation of part of Basildon in England's South West, the town planners decided on a radical approach. Rather than laying out all the costly concrete and paving stones to a pre-described plan, they set out the broad parameters of an estate or two, and then they waited.

Over time, natural pathways began to form as people trudged between their houses and the park, shops and schools, cutting off corners of grassy verges and finding the most convenient way from A to B. Once the town planners could see where the paths had been created, they paved them over, knowing that it was already a popular route and they were simply formalising what was already in place.

As this was described to me (while I was trod along a Basildon path, rather than walking around to head along the adjacent paved footpath), I realised how well this related to publishing, particularly in our understanding of the printed book.

In the past, the publishers would draw up the map, plan the routes, and pave the way for success, notwithstanding that they could have misjudged the direction. They could ‘set it in stone’ too soon, and at great expense.

In our exciting times, we could choose the Basildon path – get a few books out as ebooks or print-on-demand, at little or no cost, and then wait to see where the punters beat a path to the book. Then, and only then, do you decide whether and how to lay the paving stones and pour the concrete.

Throughout my two years of being a publisher, I’ve discovered that the printed book creates the majority of the problems and has the smallest returns.

They’re costly to produce; they need to be shipped to distributors; the distributor needs to drive them around the country; the bookseller needs to see them three months in advance before committing to stock them and then will only do so on a sale or return basis. They can’t be corrected easily (and they do all contain errors, no matter how well edited they are); they turn up late; they’re difficult to get hold of.

Furthermore, they cause more anguish in the publisher-author relationship than any other segment the whole process. I've seen perfectly sane people reduced to gibbering wrecks because of problems with the printed book.

As an author, I've experienced this for myself too. I've put a few shots across the bows of my publishers because of the print books, and I know that many of the delays, design decisions and sales difficulties ensued because of issues to do with the printed version of my books.

All this, and often for very little profit, if any. I know it's often the author's dream to hold the printed book in their hands, but in these days when the digital version has as much validity, it would be wise not to jump into print automatically. Make it a deliberate choice, and be aware of the risks when you enter into this arena.

Potential

This refers to potential in the marketplace. It's no accident that a successful vampire novel spawns a raft of other vampire novels, or that the hype of 50 Shades of Grey led to previously-rejected erotica being flung out for sale by significant publishing houses. Publishers follow the market; they will literally check through their files for the last vampire novel they received and contact that author, even if it was years ago.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that you sell your soul to the devil and press all your efforts into a genre you can't abide. There are a number of very popular books that I call 'Fuss About' titles – i.e., I only read them to find out what all the fuss is about.

More often than not, I strongly suspect, everyone else is buying them for the same reason. While we're being told that millions of people have purchased 'MRS X', I'd imagine that 990,000 of them are flicking through the first chapter and then willingly passing the book on to a neighbour.

Into the 'Fuss About' category, I would put The Da Vinci Code, Twilight, Harry Potter, Hunger Games, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, and Fifty Shades of Grey.

I've read all of them but one, and failed to see what the fuss is about at all with most of them. Some of them haven't even warranted publication, to my mind, and you certainly see books by less successful authors that are better written in every way.

I would no sooner write one of these type of books to follow the market than become a pole-dancer, because they just don't appeal to me.

But would I be happy to pull out that YA novel I wrote a few years ago before YA was popular – was even a *thing* - and give it a second shot at life? Sure. Where's the harm? It might just take off and make me some money, and if it helps support me in my writing, then I am all for it.

After all, I wrote it because I wanted to. Now someone else might want to read it. It certainly looks like it ...

Price

Think seriously about the price of your book.

Just because it cost you \$28 to produce it does not mean you'll get \$40 for it over the counter. You might only get \$20, or even \$2. Pricing in this day and age needs to be competitive.

Please see the previous point about printing.

Promotion

As you think like a publisher, you'll be only too aware of how critical the whole notion of promotion is to the success of your book.

A tiny hint for you, if you don't have a bottomless promotional budget with which to pay PR specialists and industry advertisers, is *don't try to promote your book*. I know. It sounds entirely counter-intuitive. But trust me on this. Promotion of an individual book is very hard to achieve.

Think instead of the story that goes behind it – how you journeyed to the centre of the earth to retrieve the object that inspired the book, or something similar. That will be far more likely to get you some media coverage than “Hey, I wrote a book.” These days, the likely response would be: “Yeah, you and three million others.”

Prawns

Okay, there isn't really a point about prawns. I just wanted to check you were still reading, right to the end of the chapter.

You also want to make sure your reader is with you right to the end, as you'll be advertising the next book in the series in the back, or possibly even including the first chapter of the sequel. Do whatever you can to draw readers to your website, to your series, to your Facebook page, and to the next sale. Send them a newsletter when it's out, and make it very easy for them to buy it. See my earlier point about print.

There we have it. Think like a publisher, with a plate of Ps on the negotiating table, and a heart full of prose to back it all up. Perfect.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

*Jeepers. You do all that? I only ever thought like an author.
And that's the problem – I'm a writer, not a marketer. I HATE all
that stuff.*

Can't I just write? Won't you just publish?

*Oh, wait. I can if I want to, can't I? Because now I have
choices.*

See you at the negotiating table.

Jill the Author x

Dear Jill the Author,

Look forward to it. It's an exciting time for us all.

Jill the Publisher x

**SOMETHING TO TRY: PLAN YOUR PUBLISHING
PORTFOLIO, THINKING LIKE A PUBLISHER. YES, IT
CAN GO IN THE LISTS.**

Trad publisher: Validation - Low risk, long term, small margin

New publisher: Validation – Some investment, long term, lower
margin

Publishing services provider: Reach readers especially family and
friends – high investment, high risk, small margins

E-tailer self-publishing: I have something to say – no or low
investment, low risk, high margins

Self-publish: Make Money – some investment, low risk, biggest
margin

Tip #1 Write Like A Writer

Still with me? Good. Because I am about impart the most essential piece of wisdom that any author-cum-publisher could need to know. I'm pretty sure you'll have guessed it by now, if you've been following the general theme of the book, but I have to say that, if you have, you're a darn sight quicker than I was to reach this particular denouement. It's taken me years. A dozen years; fifteen books of my own published; two dozen books by other authors published. Thousands of dollars taken in and given out. Dreams fulfilled and then shattered, and then revived again ...

Let's just recap. Throughout this book, I've highlighted my top ten tips for writing and publishing in the 21st century. We've worked our way down from #10 to #2, through that bestseller list of helpful hints:

#10 Hop on the 21st century scales

#9 Write a great book, and write it well

#8 Discover what you don't know

#7 Establish your author profile

#6 Consider why you want to be published

#5 Don't publish for fame, fortune and celebrity

#4 Identify what you can and can't do for yourself

#3 Employ worthy people to help

#2 Think like a publisher

Now here we are at number one. Really it's very simple.

Go back to #9.

Follow through to #1.

Rinse and repeat.

Write another great book, and write it well.

We are all authors and readers, and publishing is still – or perhaps more than ever – about building the bridges between these two all-important sets of people.

You want your next book to extend that bridge, and the next, and the next, and therefore you need your next book to be the best book that you could have created. If at all possible, every book should be better than the last because you are in a continuous learning loop. You haven't rested on the laurels of the first, second or third book, and you haven't become so caught up in the publishing process that you've forgotten your roots. You are an exponential curve all of your own, with every book you write being twice as good as the one that came before it. This is your craft. You must honour it.

And then the greatest joy of all is that you can write your next book, make a conscious choice about how you would like it to be published according to a number of criteria, deliver it to your market it in the most appropriate way, and then free yourself.

Cue George Michael. FREEDOM! I won't let you down.

Free yourself to write the next one. FREEDOM! I will not give you up.

Free yourself to create in that way that makes you so happy, so electrically alive that you can't help but pour heart and mind into your writing. You live to write, rather than writing to live. FREEDOM! Gotta have some faith ...

So, just to concentrate on that for a moment, don't forget that in the re-creation of the loop and going through those tips from ten to one and back again, you are now becoming quite an expert in your chosen field of writing books. This means that you could spend some of your time in creating the lifestyle that allows you to write, undertaking writing activities. You'll be writing to support your writing!

In the past, I've been asked many times over if I make a living from my writing. My reply would always be the same: I make a living from writing-related activities.

If it looked to the outside world as if I wrote full-time and lived off my royalties, then it wasn't intentional. I would, of course, spend large chunks of my time writing my books.

I would, however, spend equally large proportions of time editing manuscripts, coaching authors one-on-one, and running live and online seminars – all to do with writing books.

Another author I know generates far more income from visiting schools and entertaining the kids than from their books – but that still counts as making a living from writing.

Working in this way also creates a lifestyle of freedom. I'm still working for myself. I create my own deadlines, arrange my own appointments, and slot things into my calendar in a way that allows me to take a month at a time out to concentrate on writing. If I was employed by someone else, the wages might be more regular, but I'd have less time to do what I'm meant to be doing with my life: writing books.

All this has gone by the wayside since I became a publisher, I might add – and I haven't even published my own books! The publishing activities suck up time, energy, money and family life, leaving far less resources for diversions such as penning the odd novel.

I'm publishing on a larger scale than you're likely to, of course, but do let it be a warning to you: becoming a publisher can definitely distract you from your main mission. In law of attraction terms, focusing on publishing will bring you more publishing. Turning your attention back to writing will not only bring you more writing, but it will also inspire in you the kind of vibrational energy that leads people to your books.

You know it's true, because you've felt it.

My dream – and I suppose this comes from my HR background as much as from my life as an author and a publisher – is that one day authors will be salaried employees of publishing houses.

In fact, they'll be the best-paid employees of publishing houses, on a salary band just below the CEO. With a generous basic wage, target-related bonuses based on book sales in any format, and a profit-share scheme to reward and encourage loyalty to the publishing company that is standing by them – oh, just imagine what a wonderful life the author could have!

Not only would they have a regular and suitable income, they'd be relaxed and at their creative best. Not having to worry about how to feed the kids, pay the bills, fund that promotional trip to the mall two hundred miles away ... Their books would be magnificent. Their readers would be beside themselves with joy, the publisher and author would be reaping the rewards at a similar level, and the writer could just get on with being expert in what they do.

Magazines, journals, websites, advertising companies – every other form of written media company keeps their key contributors on staff, rather than risk losing them to competitors. Why not authors? Think about it, publishers. That's all I'm asking.

Because – and I hesitate to point it out because it seems so obvious, yet it appears to have been forgotten – here's the thing: without authors creating books, there would be no publishers. One came before the other. It is not a chicken and egg situation. Before publishers, story survived and thrived. Without publishers, stories would still be told. And legends will be shared around the green screen, long after the publisher has become Tyrannosaurus Boox.

Until that day arrives, though, we must be our own salaried employees. The best-paid employee of our own publishing company. If you're going to be able to relax into your writing and love it for the creative impulse alone, then you're going to need a wage. Pay yourself first. I mean it. Ignore everything I've said about being nice to your publisher and they'll be nice to you – as long as the publisher is you.

Invoice yourself.

Take your cut of the money before anyone else gets their hands on it.

Treat yourself like your own employee of the month: put your photo on the wall, praise that employee roundly every time you see them, and make sure they feel loved and cherished.

In the traditional publishing world, there are so many folk taking a clip of the ticket as the book wends its way to the reader's hands that there's often nothing left for you. You, the creator. That's not a criticism. That's FREEDOM.

If you know that's what you're opting for by going down the traditional publication route, then you can accept it for what it is, and enjoy the ride. You'll have knowledge, and power, and your portfolio backing you up.

For too long, publishing has been seen as some kind of black art, with the publishers assembled like the staff of Hogwarts, conjuring success from thin air.

But it's not.

Publishing is simply the process of connecting storymakers and storytakers. Writers and readers. It is bridge construction – a manageable, logistical process that can be tackled in a number of practical, logical ways.

And here's the rub. There are vast percentages of the population who could undertake some element, at least, of those practical, logical activities.

There are only small percentages who will ever be able to write a great book. Even among those who feel they have a book in them, there will only be a brave few who actually sit down and do what's necessary to start, flesh out and finish a picture book, a children's fable, a soul-replenishing novel ...

That, to my mind, is the gift that is to be honoured, and I salute your creativity and your willingness to share your talents with the world. In the end, publishing is nothing to be frightened of. Writing and creative or artistic ability, on the other hand, is something of which the majority are in awe.

Keep that in mind at all times. You're special. Have faith in yourself, and keep on keeping on. That's the true test of a writer. With the capacity and bandwidth of the publishing world in the 21st century, there are no excuses for not giving it a go. You can do what you love, and make it work according to your own mantra.

Here's my mantra. Writers have to write. I know I do.

Writers gotta write. That's it! It's easy.

And that's where I'm off to now. I've had more fun writing this book in recent weeks than I've had in ages, and when things are that much of a hoot, you want to do them again.

See you in a novel or two. Happy writing, happy publishing, and go write that book.

Dear Jill the Publisher,

We're in this together, somehow. Let's make the most of it.

J the A xx

Dear Jill the Author,

Okay, then. Now, where do we start?

J the P xx

**SOMETHING TO TRY: WRITE YOUR BOOK, THEN
FOLLOW TIPS 10 THROUGH TO 1. THEN FILL IN YOUR
FINAL GRID. EXAMPLE FOLLOWS:**

Traditional publisher

Get validation. I'll do through the Big Six publishers. Jane Blonde UK, Europe, Commonwealth. Available in bookstores online and bricks-and-mortar

New Publisher

Validation plus Power. Pear Jam Books/boutique publishers. Will publish Jane Blonde US, Jack BC, Matilda Peppercorn and School of Ice series here. Available in stores and e-stores and on Pear Jam Books website.

Publishing services provider

Reach family and friends. Mum and Dad's book just for their party.

E-tailer with self-publishing capability

I have something to say. Writers Gotta Write! Through Amazon's Createspace, KDP, Kindle, for global ebook and print on demand.

Stand-alone Self-publishing

Might make money! I'll do my women's fiction this way (x 3 titles) via Smashwords and own websites for Pear Jam Books and Jill Marshall Books.

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Couldn't mention people to thank without saying YAY! to all the readers who've given me such wonderful feedback and supported me in my own books and Pear Jam's. You rock.

Most of all, thank you to my family and friends, and especially Katie and Lewis, for riding the roller coaster with me.

The best is yet to come.

For more about Jill's books, go to

www.jillmarshallbooks.com

For more about Jill's coaching and training, go to

www.jillmarshallauthoracademy.com

For more about Jill's publishing company, go to

www.pearjambooks.com

For information on all rights for any books written or published by Jill, or to talk to Andrea in Australasia, David in US, or Jill in UK/Europe, go to **<http://www.jillmarshall.co/>**

And a little excerpt of the book I forgot to mention to anyone:

MATILDA PEPPERCORN, SWITCH

Prologue

The hag lifted her blackened, empty eye sockets to the horizon, sniffing the salt of the Aegean. ‘They are here,’ she said. ‘I smell them - washed up on the shore.’

‘Who will fetch them?’ cried another of the three sisters, grey hair whipping around her shrivelled skull as the zephyr from the sea grew stronger.

The third sister scrambled to her feet. ‘Give me the eye,’ she said. ‘I am the strongest, so it is I who should go.’

‘We are all strong, sister,’ muttered the first hag scathingly. ‘Born old and wise, protectors of our sisters, the Gorgons. All strong. Why do we not go together?’

‘Because we will waste more time arguing!’ snapped the triplet. ‘Stay here, and await my message.’

With that, she snatched the single eye that they all shared from her sister’s gnarled hand, and flung herself across the overhang that protected them from those who sought them out. Looking for the truth. For healing. For destiny.

Down on the shoreline that they so rarely visited, it was just as her sister had reported. There were the stones, scattered across the beach in what appeared to be a random pattern.

The Graeae sister held the eye aloft, and read aloud from the mystic markings on the pebbles. Thousands of feet above, her sisters would hear, and remember:

‘Defender of the Trinity and all the sisters’ legacy,

A child of unknown birth will be selected by the Guardian
Three ...’

Chapter 1

Which do you think is harder – learning how to write a letter in Swedish? Or picking up the phone and calling your best friend’s parents and telling them they can’t, just CAN’T, take her out of our school and send her somewhere else because I just won’t let them. I will not!

Mattan told me just to call them after she’d spilled the beans on their terrible plans, because Swedish is quite a tricky language to learn by all accounts. But sometimes calling people and being very direct is hard. I’d still rather write a letter ... one like this:

Dear Mr and Mrs Lundquist,

Please, please do not take Mattan out of school. I know she is a brilliant dancer and should be going to High School Musical and making you all a fortune, but the truth is she has to be here at my school with me. I will miss her too much if she leaves, and with my shady past who knows what might happen to me.

And I really, truly don't think that Mattan will survive without me either. You know how weedy she is. Just like you, Mr Lundquist. I mean, slender and tall like a stalk of wheat. Not weedy really. Did I say weedy? No, I meant reedy, like a ... reed.

At some stage in our futures - like when I go to university here and Mattan returns to Swedeland to dance for the Royal Ballet of Swedes - we know we will have to separate. But to split us up now would just be cruel. And mean. And downright neglectful! (PS I know you are Swedish and sometimes don't know the long words, so just to explain that neglectful means 'full of neglect.').

I think we all know it's for the best if you just leave her at Dewbank. With me. .

Thank you and yours faithfully. Oh, hang on, that's for if you don't know the person's name that you're writing to ... thank you and yours sincerely.

Tilly Peppercorn

PPPS Faithfully means 'full of faith'. I am. And sincere as well. I believe in you. I believe you can do the right thing. I truly do!

There. That's the letter I would have liked to send to them. But Mattan was probably right. They wouldn't understand it. And I couldn't learn Swedish fast enough. So I had to call them, which I did as soon as I got in from school on the day Mattan told me the Horrible Truth.

'Hello, Mrs Lundquist, it's me, Matilda Peppercorn,' I said cheerfully, just to con her into thinking I was calling to speak to Mattan.

‘Ah, hello, Tilly,’ she replied, completely unsuspecting, still saying Tilly in that way of hers that makes it sound like Teelee, like most of the word *tea-leaf* without the f. ‘I will just get Mattan for you.’

‘No, that’s okay; I called to speak to you.’

‘To ... me?’ Mrs Lundquist had that same wary note in her voice that my parents have whenever School calls home; the one that says ‘okay, what’s she done now?’ ‘Why do you want to speak to me?’

‘I think you know why, Mrs Lundquist,’ I said firmly. ‘I wanted to ask you what it would take to make you let Mattan stay at our school. I have a fine collection of Bruce Lee memorabilia – perhaps you would like it.’ Who could resist? ‘Some of it,’ I added. Well, really, some of the collection took me years to buy off E-Bay.

Strangely, though, rather than snapping up my Bruce Lee posters, Mrs Lundquist sounded as though she was trying not to laugh. ‘Ah, I believe I have all the Bruce Lee things that I need right now,’ she said in a funny strangled voice. ‘Anyway, Teelee, we have not yet fully decided about Mattan’s school. We know she is very happy at Dewbank ...’

‘She is!’

‘... and what good friends you are ...’

‘We are!’

‘... but if we could just make sure she got enough time for her dancing ...’

‘We could!’

There was a long pause, then, ‘How?’ said Mrs Lundquist.

Luckily I’d thought about this. ‘I think Mattan should be let off all homework because she is a dancing star, and maybe should go home early three times a week. And because I am nearly as good at kick-boxing as Mattan is at dancing, I should be let off homework and go home early too.’

‘Ah, let me guess,’ said Mrs Lundquist slowly. ‘On the same days? Together?’

We were obviously completely on the same wavelength.

‘Exactly. It does make sense.’

Mrs Lundquist had a bit of a coughing fit. ‘All right, Teelee. I will bear all of your points in my mind.’

‘That’s all I ask,’ I said. Sometimes I am so grown up I stagger myself. This was one of those times; I didn’t even correct the ‘in my mind’ thing. ‘Bye, Mrs Lundquist.’

I put the phone down quite satisfied, and was still smiling when Mum came in.

‘What are you so happy about?’ she said, giving me a peck on the cheek.

‘I think I just persuaded Mattan’s parents to let her stay at Dewbank. They were going to put her in stage school because Miss Martin’s ballet classes aren’t good enough for her any more.’ I rifled through the biscuit barrel and chose a mint cream one covered in chocolate. ‘You have one clever daughter, Caroline.’

Mum’s eyes filled with tears instantly. ‘Oh, darling, you don’t *have* to call me ‘Mum’, I know, but you’ve got so good at it recently. I really thought we’d had a breakthrough.’

She reached for her hanky and I gave in. It's only funny to wind her up for so long ...

'Okay, you have one clever daughter, *Mum*. Mummy mummy mummy mum. My mummy. Mumsy Mum.'

Sadly this made her blub more than ever. 'My Tilly. Thank you! Thank you, sweetheart!' You'd have thought I'd just given her diamonds. 'You are SO precious to us; you know that, don't you?'

'Mum,' I said, passing her a cookie. 'You tell me ten times day, which is seventy times a week, which is three thousand six hundred and forty times a year. By my thirteenth birthday you'll have had me for over well over eleven years which is ...' Even I couldn't work that one out. 'Which is heaps of times you've told me I'm precious. I know. Thank you. Love you. Over and out.'

'I'm over-reacting, aren't I?'

'Teeny bit,' I said, and gave her a kiss on the cheek. She cheered up after that, and after she'd told me to cut my fingernails later (owing to the amount of cookie crumbs under them), I was left to eat my snack in peace.

They do over-react a fair bit, Caroline and Ian. Or “Mum and Dad” as they like me to call them. (They are totally my mum and dad, really; the Caroline and Ian stuff just makes me giggle). The reason they do it is because they adopted me and want to make up for everything bad that might have ever have happened to me before they came along. Which I can’t remember anyway, so it really and truly doesn’t matter.

Sometimes they flip at the tiniest thing. Honestly. For example, one day when I was about seven it was discovered that I had really weak wrists, and therefore I sucked at gymnastics – handstands and hanging off bars, that kind of stuff. I had to sit the lesson out and then go to the nurse to get plasters for my scratched little hands.

It didn't bother me one bit, but the next day I was called in to see the headmistress and both my parents were there, and the headmistress, Miss Tabitha Green, had to apologise to me – to ME – because she hadn't realised that my wrists were a bit dodgy because I'd been tied to my cot in the orphanage in Russia. I felt sorry for the headmistress, really. She was completely embarrassed, and kept twiddling the button on the cuff of her jacket while the tip of her nose turned pink. How was she to know that I wasn't just rubbish at gym? (Still, I'm very glad it *was* discovered because that's when she suggested that I take up kick-boxing, which uses my legs more than my hands, but also boxing with gloves to strengthen my wrists. Cool.)

Or there was that other time my parents went la-la, when I'd just gone to my new junior school. It was the first day, and everyone was there with their parents, and Ian and Caroline had just been introduced to Mr and Mrs Lundquist who were explaining that they'd moved here from Sweden.

Suddenly out of nowhere this mouse appeared. It ran straight over their daughter's foot and she screamed like a complete girl. Well, she was a complete girl, with hair so white and curly it looked like the frosting on a carrot cake. But the minute she screamed, I was off after that mouse. (Actually everyone thought I shooed it off into the field, but really I took it home and fed it cheese until it got too fat and died. Then I cried – like a complete girl. Since then I've always had a rodent pet of some kind to make up for over-feeding the mouse; right now it's a gerbil called Fatima, although in case we made a mistake and it's actually a boy, I call it Fatty just to be safe).

Anyway, as I was walking back towards our parents and the screaming girl, this woman who was standing nearby (without any kids but with a clipboard instead) shouted across to us. 'Hey, you – the girl with the weird hair!'

Well, she was a fine one to talk – it was summer and she had an enormous cloak on and her hood up. If that wasn't trying to hide weird hair I don't know what was ...

I stood up very very tall. 'Leave her alone, she can't help it,' I said. 'She's Swedish.'

At that the woman threw back her head and laughed this horrible laugh, like she had asthma. ‘Actually,’ she said eventually, pointing straight at me, ‘I meant you.’

That was enough for poor Ian and Caroline. Grabbing my little hand, Caroline pulled me backwards into her cotton skirt, while Ian stuck his finger out at the capey crow woman. ‘How dare you?’ he said, in what was a very angry voice for Ian. ‘How dare you discriminate against our daughter? Her hair is perfectly normal, thank you.’

‘Normal?’ The woman pushed a tendril of her own dark hair back under her cloak, examining it on the way as if to say “now, *that’s* normal and really rather gorgeous.” ‘The girl’s hair is grey.’

And it was. I hadn’t really noticed until that point that none of the other seven-and-a-half year olds I knew had grey hair. None of the other children of *any* age had grey hair, now I thought about it, nor quite a lot of adults. Particularly not grey hair that could look a bit silver in some light, or even slightly blue if it was raining and it stuck to my head.

The girl who'd been screaming stopped screaming abruptly and looked at me and my weird hair. Then she gave me this firm little smile. 'I like it,' she said.

'So do we,' said Caroline fiercely, glaring at the hooded clip-board lady. 'And we'd thank you to be a little more sensitive, if you don't mind. Matilda was in a Russian orphanage for the first eighteen months of her life, and the shock of something dreadful that happened to her there clearly turned her hair grey. You've just reminded a little girl of her terrible start in life. I hope you're proud of yourself. Ignore the horrible lady, Matilda.'

'Caro, she might be a teacher,' said Ian under his breath, and for a second they both looked very anxious.

She wasn't, though. To everyone's relief, the woman just pulled a face and wandered off.

The freakishly blonde girl was still staring at me. 'Yes?' I said.

'Your name is Matilda?'

'Yes.'

'My name is Matilda too.'

This was very puzzling. ‘But it can’t be. We can’t have the same name.’

At that all our parents laughed. ‘Lots of people share names,’ said my dad. ‘There are many, many Ians out there, believe me.’

‘But we’re so different,’ I said. I thought Matilda *meant* something – child of kick-boxing destiny, perhaps, or “girl with interesting grey hair”. How could we both be called the same thing?

‘This is true,’ said Mr Lundquist, who looked like a tall version of Swedish Matilda with a beard. ‘And you are in the same class so it may be confusing for us all.’ I liked the way he said ‘confusing’ and ‘us’, with lots of ‘ssss’ sounds. ‘In Sweden we can say *Mattan* instead of Matilda.’

My parents beamed. ‘Oh, how gorgeous! And we call our Matilda ... Tilly.’

Euch. Embarrassing. They’d never done that in public before – “our Matilda”.

‘So now we haiff two friends in one class,’ said Mr Lundquist. ‘Our two Matildas, Tilly and Mattan.’

‘Does Mattan mean anything?’ I asked quietly, hoping it wasn’t “girl of kick-boxing brilliance”.

Mattan grinned her little pearly grin at me. ‘Yes. It means ... the doormat.’ I stared at her. ‘Does Tilly mean something?’

‘No,’ I said quickly.

I never did find out if it meant anything. It was just the name I’d had in the orphanage, anyway, and as it sounded a bit Russian, my parents kept it. So that’s it: Matilda-a-bit-Russian, and Peppercorn because that’s their surname.

But suddenly I grinned back at the Blonde Freak. If I had to share my name with anyone, I was very glad it was with this smiley Swedish person.

And so Tilly and Mattan were born. And became best friends. And were never ever separated from that moment on until Mattan’s evil Swedish parents decided to try to do their evil best for her and give her evil opportunities to be a world-class dancer. Evil. Mean and cruel!

But I did my bit. I made my phone call. From then on, I was sure, everything would work out just fine. I could relax.

The biscuit was finished. Finito. All gone. Maybe it was time for another. I hopped off the bar stool and then stopped like a statue.

Schloipp.

That was the noise I heard as I jumped. I took a step just to make sure I hadn't made the sound myself, then stopped still again. There it was, a hideous slurping sound coming from the window. Hmm. I stalked two deliberately loud steps towards the biscuit barrel and then swivelled round to stare at the window.

Covering a large patch at the bottom of the window was a large translucent pinkish blob. It was about the size of a cymbal, with funny creases in it. Very funny creases. It reminded me of something ... something to do with Dad ...

And then I remembered. Sometimes when Dad has to do mediating with little kids involved, he sticks on these massive fake BFG ears to show them he's really, really listening. That was the thing plastered over my window – a huge fake ear. But somehow this didn't look fake, and as I moved across the kitchen, dancing around a bit to see if my eyes were telling me the truth and it was kind of eavesdropping on me, it slurped and slapped its way across the glass like a living creature. Following me.

Just to be sure it was an ear, I took off my shoes. Then I crept along the kitchen wall until I got to the window, pressed my lips against the glass and shouted 'BOO!'

Well, it was definitely an ear. A weird one, for sure, but definitely an ear. The minute I yelled it fell off the window like a startled jelly-fish, shrinking as it whistled back towards the head it was part of, and disappearing behind the edge of a large flappy black hood.

The familiar face that glared up at me was as criss-crossed as a piece of cracked pavement. ‘She’s spotted me!’ snapped the woman, the same weird woman I’d seen several years ago when I first met Mattan. ‘Abort! Abort!’ she screamed to nobody in particular.

I wrenched open the window. ‘What are you aborting?’

‘Mind your own beeswax,’ the woman said nastily, standing up so her mangy old face was suddenly on a level with me, even though I was inside the house and she was down in the garden.

‘I think it is my beeswax,’ I said. ‘You’re standing in my garden.’

‘Not any more,’ she hissed, and suddenly there was a swirl of black cloak that ripped through Dad’s prized rose bushes like a tornado, and she was gone.

But not before I’d managed to get a glimpse of her clipboard. Yes, she had it with her again. Her wrinkly hand had covered half of it, but I did manage to get a glance at the top half of the sheet.

THE THREE TESTS, it said.

And number one – DEFEND – had a large black tick scrawled across it.

Wow. There'd be tears over this if I told Caroline and Ian that the nasty clipboard woman was hiding in the bushes. Especially when Dad found out her boots had been trampling all over his special mosaic.

Probably best not to mention it, I thought, and I got my biscuit – finally – and wandered off to watch TV.

That was a prawn, if you're still with me ;-). See you soon, Jill x

Oh, and for more Matilda Peppercorn, go to www.jillmarshall.co

