

Will You Make It As a Writer?

Transcript

This is a transcript of the seminar, edited slightly for easy reading.

You can find the audio version at www.writershuddle.com/seminars/mar2014.

This seminar topic was inspired by Bill Borg, who posted a quite heartfelt piece in the Huddle forums about a writer of his acquaintance who has perhaps not had the easiest time of being a writer.

She's written twenty-odd books but she's still in a position where maybe she's not as financially successful as she'd like to be. And it sounds like she has been quite disheartened by the experience.

Bill knows her through his book group, and he's been put off or discouraged a bit on his own writing journey, because he would have liked to see more encouragement from this person. Here's the link to his post:

[It may be lonely at the beginning](#)

It would be great if you want to pause here and go and read it and then come back, but I will be pulling out a few key quotes from things Bill says that I think are really interesting and worth digging into and having a think about.

Staying Positive (Even When the Writers You Meet Aren't)

What I really admired was that Bill has stayed very positive. He's still committed to being a writer, he's aware that sometimes in the writing world it feels like the odds are against us, but he's determined to get somewhere despite that.

And I think that Bill speaks to a common experience. When we do come across writers, we can feel quite star-struck – I know I do – and it can be very tempting to hang on every word they say, to really want to know their secrets - you know, how did they get that book deal? How did they become famous?

But sometimes the writers we come across are a bit jaded by their experience: maybe they've not actually had an easy time of it, like Bill's friend. And they might even be discouraging. They might say "don't quit the day job," or they might say "actually, there's no money in writing fiction," or "publishing is dying" or "ebooks have taken over," or "you can't get a deal with a traditional publisher anymore."

There may be some truth in all of the things they say. But, I think **it's really important not to take all of this too much to heart and not to get too discouraged.**

What Are Authors Experiencing in Today's World?

Before we go a bit further, I want to take a look at some authors who I know of, or who I know, who have had experiences along similar lines to Bill's friend.

I do think it's important to acknowledge that the traditional publishing world is changing. It's going through a time of upheaval and has been doing so maybe for the last six or so years – since the Kindle started to take off, since ebooks became popular. Self-publishing has become far more mainstream than it used to be.

J.A. Konrath

<http://jakonrath.blogspot.co.uk>

One example is an author called J. A. Konrath, who writes mainly thrillers. Konrath was traditionally published quite extensively, and if you dig back on his blog a few years you'll find lots of posts about doing book signings and promoting yourself as a traditionally published author.

But he's very, very much in the camp of self-published or indie authors now. And in fact Konrath is really quite outspoken about feeling that traditional publishing is not a good deal for writers any more, and that self-publishing is definitely the way to go.

I don't necessarily agree with everything that Konrath says, but you may want to take a look at some of what he's writing about. He has had a huge amount of experience on both sides of the publishing fence.

Lorna Fergusson

(<http://www.fictionfire.co.uk>)

Then another is a good friend of mine. She's also the editor of my novel and somebody who I work with professionally: Lorna Fergusson. She was our guest speaker back in November, talking about Heroes and Villains, and she's a really, really good writer and somebody again with experience on both the traditional and self-publishing side of things.

Lorna's book, *The Chase*, came out quite a few years ago with Bloomsbury, who are a big publisher in the UK, a well-known, well-respected publishing house. But it went out of print as traditionally published books do, and Lorna had quite an extensive struggle to get the rights back to *The Chase* so that she could republish it.

Bloomsbury weren't actually publishing it or printing it anymore, but Lorna had to get the rights back so that she could make an ebook version under her own imprint, and also a new physical paperback version.

From knowing Lorna and from what she's said, I'm aware that there's a huge advantage to having the traditional publishing deal. It definitely gives you a certain credibility. Back when *The Chase* first came out, there was probably not really any other good option - you know, self-publishing was not regarded as such a professional option as it is now, and it was a lot more expensive to do because this was before the days of e-publishing and print on demand.

Friend from Goldsmiths

And then my third example is a friend of mine from Goldsmiths. I did a Masters at Goldsmiths in creative writing, part-time between 2008 and 2010, and I met some wonderful writers and friends there.

One of those is a really talented writer who was working on a memoir of sorts. She got an agent really quite quickly after finishing the course. But four years

on from that now, she's not in a place where the book's been published. She's had an excerpt of it published in a broadsheet newspaper here in the UK, so you know, her agent has definitely helped her make progress, helped her get some visibility. And she's worked on a novel for that agent, and they're now shopping that around to publishers.

But she's not at the point where she's had a book come out yet. She's not maybe living the writing dream that some of us, certainly me, hope for, i.e. you get your agent, you get a book deal, you quit your day job and you can just write full-time, and the money is pouring in.

And actually it was a little bit disillusioning for me, and probably for quite a few of our peers at Goldsmiths, to watch this. Because we were all very excited when she got her agent, and I guess we all thought that once you've got an agent, hey, that's it, you know - that's the big step accomplished. And actually that's not really the case.

My friend is by far not the only person I know who's gone through this process – it's not that she's just been really, really unlucky. **Sometimes, maybe quite often, authors get agents and it can be a long, long wait for their book to get published.** Maybe they write a second book, as my friend's done, or it may be that the agent wants them to make quite extensive changes to their book.

Why This Isn't Cause for Despair

All of this is to say that I think that Bill and the writer he knows have some points. Traditional publishing is going through some weird times, and it's not the case that you can just make it by getting your agent or getting a book deal or what have you. And obviously there are quite a lot of writers chasing agents and chasing book deals who don't get that far.

But, I don't think this is cause to be really disheartened or discouraged. It would be very easy at this point to say, oh, you know, clearly very few people make it in writing – maybe I'll be one of the lucky ones. You know, I'll carry on just in case I'm that one in a thousand, or one in ten thousand, who makes it.

And I think that's a little bit defeatist, because the odds are better than that.

To be honest, if you've started a blog, if you've drafted a novel, if you've got a collection of essays or a collection of short stories – if you've got anything where you can point to something and say “I wrote that, I revised it, I really worked on this,” maybe over a period of years, you've done far more than a lot of people who want to be writers.

There are lots and lots of people out there who would love to have written a book but they don't want to do the work of writing it. There are lots of people who maybe have a great idea for a novel but have never got as far as putting words down on the page.

You're ahead of all of them just by virtue of having written. And honestly, you can't get anywhere without actually doing the writing. If you're not going to actually write down something then there's not really much point.

So the odds are probably better than you think, if you're imagining this huge mass of would-be writers versus the inevitably smaller number of people who have successful blogs, or who've had books published and so on.

A Few Words on the Publishing Industry

So something I want to touch on before we go a bit further is the publishing industry as a whole. Because I've sometimes come across the perception from writers that publishers are just a load of crooks.

That's not true, but I can understand why some people do end up feeling a bit cynical about the whole process. **I think it's important to try and get your head around what things look like from the publisher's perspective.**

To the publisher, books are a product. They're running a business and books are what they sell. And they can't take on a book just because it has massive literary merit. Unless they are a literary publisher with a very specific mission, or unless they've got funding or something like that to publish really experimental works, frankly, they're going to publish books that they think will sell.

As writers, we could wring our hands about this, and say “That isn't how it should be, clearly artistic merit counts, not commercial appeal.”

Personally I'm quite a commercial writer. I don't think of myself as very literary. I don't think I have the patience or the skill to do that. So it's not been something that's worried me so much.

But I know it is something that bothers some writers, particularly if what's really important to you is the craft of writing and writing extremely good, beautiful prose, or writing poetry and so on.

Publishers have businesses to run. And of course, like in any area of life, there will be some publishers who are incompetent; there will be others who are deliberately out to screw authors. But in general, that's not the case, and I think the publishing industry is not as bad as some writers make it out to be.

What's Your Definition of Success?

So let's get into the main meat of what I want to talk about today, which is whether you'll make it as a writer, and what you can do to improve your odds.

Before you go too far it's important to try and figure out what "making it" means to you. What does success look like to you? Because it's different for different writers.

For one person success might be getting a book published by a traditional publisher and having it in bookstores. Even if it didn't sell that many copies, that to them would be success – it would be something physical they could point to, it would be something their friends and family would recognise as being of worth, and so on.

That's a perfectly valid goal. But it's not the only way to look at success. So it could be that to you, success means making six figures a year writing novels. And maybe that's not a hundred per cent realistic goal, you may find that you have to moderate, certainly to begin with, what you want to achieve before you can feel like a success. Because it could be quite discouraging to chase a really, really big goal if you're only making small steps towards it.

What's a "Realistic" Goal?

In his post, Bill talked about meeting a writer at a party. So this is a separate person from the woman he knew through his book group. And she too was really discouraging – he says she went on and on about how tough the writing business is and how hard she has worked at it. So she was obviously perhaps in a place where she was feeling a bit defeated by it all.

Bill shared his ambitions and his goals of publishing a collection of essays and a book. And his hope was to sell ten thousand books. This writer who he met was adamant that his first book was only going to sell between fifty and a hundred copies.

Now I agree with Bill that this seems unnecessarily discouraging. **Of course, statistically, many first books don't sell particularly well, and if you're self-publishing, maybe you will only sell fifty or a hundred copies.** But there's an awful lot you can do to help yourself, and frankly, statistics are based on *everybody*.

Some writers might put their book out there and not do anything to market it. Or some books might be complete rubbish from beginning to end. So although ten thousand books is a pretty ambitious figure (that would be putting you into bestseller territory in the UK at least), I don't think it's a really unrealistic figure or a silly or unreachable ambition.

And I'm sorry that Bill's had such discouraging experiences when he's tried to share his ambitions with people, because hopefully as writers we're able to support one another even if we've been through some difficult spells ourselves.

So whatever your definition of success might be, whether it's just having your book in bookshops, whether it's getting your book up on Amazon yourself, whether it's selling ten thousand copies of your book, whether it's making a living from your writing - I know that's a big ambition for many people - it's important to know what you're shooting at before you begin.

Do You Have What it Takes to Succeed?

Bill said something in his post that I thought was interesting, and I wonder if it's something that you feel too. He says, "Assuming only one in a hundred or a thousand have what it takes to succeed, it's often necessary for a newcomer to have high expectations and then deal with the inevitable disappointment along the way."

I think more people than that have it in them to succeed. I think sometimes we stop ourselves before we've really got very far, or we get discouraged too early on – though I certainly agree with Bill that it can be lonely at the beginning.

It can be tough when you're a new writer and you're exploring different ways to get your work out there, and there's still lots to learn, and maybe you don't even know what you need to learn – you're just struggling on and it can feel like you're in the dark.

But I think that everybody in the Huddle certainly has it in them to succeed and to reach their goals, whatever those may be. I've seen many of you writing forum posts or you've emailed me, or I've looked at your blogs, and so on. And there's a huge amount of writing talent here.

Now obviously talent isn't everything, or we'd all be writing bestsellers, and maybe some of the bestsellers out there which perhaps are not full of talent would not be doing quite so well.

There's a lot more which matters in writing, like hard work and to some extent luck. But there is a lot that you can do to help yourself have a good chance of making it.

Are You Willing to Branch Out as a Writer?

In terms of setting your goals, something that you may need to think about if you're primarily a fiction writer is **whether you're determined to just write novels (or short stories) or whether you're willing to explore other possibilities.**

When I was a slightly younger writer, I was really keen to write novels. As an undergraduate, my career plan consisted of "I'll write a novel, get an agent, get a book deal and write some more novels."

Obviously things didn't pan out quite that way, and actually I'm glad they didn't, because I don't think I'd want to write novels full-time. There are too many other types of writing that I really enjoy.

But I didn't know that back then, and it took me a little bit of exploring to discover that I really love blogging; I love writing for the Web.

It's an exciting way to work, especially if you're used to working on something like a novel or a memoir or a collection of essays that's just on your computer drive and no one except you sees it for months on end.

It's great to be able to write a blog post, publish it the same day or the next day, and get feedback straight away. You can explore different ideas and possibilities and get some feedback and you can always go back and change things, or you can take a new direction with your blog.

We're living in a really exciting time for this, where anybody can publish online. You don't need to be very technically-minded, you don't need to spend lots of money – things like blogging or also things like Twitter, Facebook, social media, are very much open to anyone.

It's the same with e-publishing – putting your book up on Amazon, say, for sale – this is much more accessible than it was even four or five years ago.

How Much Does Money Matter to You?

Something else you might consider is whether or not money is at the heart of your definition of success.

Now for me it's important to be able to make a living from my writing – not necessarily from fiction, I'm nowhere near making a living from writing fiction! My income comes from writing work for clients and also through working with writers through things like Writers' Huddle.

So that's important for me, but that might not be what matters to you. **Maybe what matters to you is to reach an audience with your writing and to write something that you really love.**

I know we've got quite a few people in the Huddle who write fan fiction. Now the interesting thing about fan fiction is that it's something you can't really make any money from, certainly not directly, because it's illegal to do so. So I think this is an amazing thing. There's something very real and almost quite pure about the way in which communities come together and write stories about characters in a universe that they love.

Doing that when you know there's no money in it, you're just doing it for the love of, for the enjoyment of writing. And I think there's a ton you can learn about writing in general from doing fan fiction, a lot you could apply to writing your own original fiction, writing a novel, writing short stories set in your own worlds with your own characters.

Or if what matters to you is just reaching that audience and enjoying the writing, you might just stick with fanfiction, and just write fanfiction, and never write something in your own world, with your own characters. I think that's perfectly legitimate.

If you're a non-fiction writer, maybe the equivalent would be writing something like Wikipedia entries. Thousands of people edit Wikipedia completely unpaid – they add their own information to it, they refine what's already been written, and so on.

They're not going to get any reward for that, they do it out of maybe the love of a particular subject, out of a desire to contribute, and maybe, if they're editing the final details, out of a love for good writing and wanting things to be clear and consistent. So there are all sorts of things you might write that don't involve making money.

You Don't Need Permission to Write

Then before I get into some practical tips, something else that came out of Bill's post for me, that I want to get everybody in the Huddle to think about a

bit, is that **you don't need to wait for somebody else to validate you or to give you permission to write.**

Something that I think is troubling Bill in his post is that the writers he spoke to didn't encourage him. They didn't compliment him. His writer friend in his book group said he was a good writer but Bill says that he was surprised she never suggested he go professional. He was also hoping for encouragement from the writer he met at a party, but he didn't get any from her either.

And I think this happens to a lot of us. Maybe we've got friends who are a bit further along in the writing world or there are writers who we've met through a common acquaintance or something, and maybe they see some of our work or maybe we tell them about our goals, and we're really, really hoping they'll say, "Yes, you're brilliant!" or "Yes, go for it," or "You've got a great chance", or even "Hey, here's my agent's number, give her a call," or something.

Why the Writers You Meet May Be Discouraging

Sadly it doesn't often go like that, and I think there are a few reasons why writers aren't always very encouraging to others.

#1: They're Self-Centred

It sounded a little bit, to me, reading between the lines about Bill's writer friend in his book group, that maybe she just didn't even think that Bill might want to become a professional writer, it just didn't occur to her to think about Bill's ambitions and dreams and so on.

#2: They Don't Want to Be Asked to Edit Your Manuscript

Then a second reason that writers may be reluctant to be too encouraging is because they're afraid they're going to get drawn into your writing dreams . They might fear you'll ask them to read their whole manuscript.

Even as a really quite modestly successful writer, I get a lot of emails from people who want my help, like "Can you read my blog, give me some advice," or "Can you answer my questions about e-publishing."

It's difficult, because I don't like to have to say no to people, but honestly I would get nothing else done if I just spent all my time reading people's work and editing it for free and looking at their blogs and giving them advice and so on.

So I think sometimes writers are a little bit reluctant to be encouraging because maybe they've had an experience in the past where they did say something positive and then they were expected to read a whole manuscript or something as a result.

#3: They Don't Want to Talk Shop

Then a third reason, especially if you maybe bump into someone at a party, is that they may just not want to talk shop. So by that I mean maybe they just actually want to be out of the writing professional world for a bit. And they don't really want to be thinking about writing, or giving people advice on writing, or listening to other people on writing, and so on.

So maybe they shut the conversation down just because they don't want to pursue that particular topic at that point. I can see that that would be frustrating, but it's not really to do with you, it's to do with them.

#4: They Can't Remember What it Was Like to be New

And then fourthly, I think some writers have forgotten what it's like to be new. It was so long ago for them that they got their first break, they don't really remember, you know, how nerve-wracking it can be, how eager you can be, how much your ambitions are tied up in getting an agent or just getting that one sentence of encouragement from somebody.

The other possibility here is that they're worried that they might say something that comes across as patronising, because they can't really remember what it was like to be in your shoes. So they're not really sure what to say to encourage you without it coming across the wrong way.

So there are all sorts of reasons why people might not give you the encouragement you're looking for and the validation that you're hoping for,

and honestly, they're not really to do with you and your writing - they're more to do with the writer themselves.

What You Can Do to Help Yourself Succeed

On to the good news, then, and what you can do. The good news is that there are an awful lot of resources out there. There are tons of books on writing, there's tons of blogs on writing, there are courses and conferences and classes - hey, you're in Writers' Huddle so you've got quite a lot of resources at your fingertips already.

There are lots and lots of other writers who you can meet up with online, face to face, at conferences or writing holidays, and so on. And you can get that encouragement that you're looking for from other people who are in the same boat as you. You know, maybe they're looking to get their first book published, maybe they've started up a blog - whatever it might be.

I'm going to run through a bunch of things that you can do to boost your chances of success. So as we said earlier, it may be that your definition of success is quite different from somebody else's. But whatever your definition of success is, I think that these seven points should help.

#1: Set Goals and Targets

That might be something quite ambitious long-term, like Bill's hope to have a book of essays published and sell ten thousand copies. **In the short-term I think though it's helpful to set some slightly smaller goals and targets.**

You might decide that, initially, your goal is to finish a draft of your novel, or perhaps to self-publish your book and sell five hundred copies. That would be great - five hundred copies would be really good. Some books that get longlisted for major prizes like the Booker haven't sold as many as five hundred copies when they come out in hardback, before they get longlisted.

Five hundred copies, it might not sound like loads but that's actually a big, big success.

#2: Be Open to New Possibilities

Secondly, at the same time as having some clear goals and targets, think about other directions you might want to try too. I mentioned earlier that I was a bit too focused on just writing fiction in my early years as a writer. And **it may be that you're ignoring a particular type of writing that you could actually quite enjoy, just because you don't think it's right for you.**

Do be open to possibilities. Maybe you could do a blog, or maybe self-publishing would work for you, or maybe you're going to work on a memoir, or some poetry, or some fan fiction, or something totally different to the sorts of writing that you've explored in the past – because you don't know where it will take you.

So I think, while you're pursuing your main goals and targets, try and allow yourself a bit of time to explore and to look into some other possibilities as well.

#3: Keep a Record of Your Achievements

Then the third thing, and this sounds quite small but it's been deceptively powerful for me, is to keep a record of what you achieve.

I started doing this while I was still working full-time, before I launched my business. Every month I wrote down four or so bullet points, things that I'd achieved.

To begin with they were some really small things, like I had my first guest post on a blog. I've probably written dozens if not maybe hundreds of guest posts in the five or six years since then. But without doing that very first guest post, without taking the plunge, the very first time, I couldn't have had the success that I've had with my blogging.

Those small things really add up. And it's encouraging to sit down at the end of each month and write down what you've achieved. But when you look back after six months, or a year, or five years, it's amazing to see how all those little steps – that maybe at the time didn't seem like so much – led to bigger and bigger and bigger steps, and led you to where you are currently.

So it's a really encouraging thing to do, both in the moment of doing it but also in retrospect when you're able to look back. And this record of what you achieve could take any form you like. It could be very, very simple, just a list of bullet points like mine, it could be a journal, it could be something more creative and visual where you keep images that relate to your successes, and so on.

#4: Get Support from Positive People

Then the fourth thing is to surround yourself with positive people. I know this is advice that came up for Bill in the forums as well. And one of the things I really, really love about the community in the Huddle is that I think we are all positive, supportive, encouraging people.

I've never seen anyone in the Huddle be really negative and just say "well, there's no point, you're probably not going to make it" or "your writing sucks" or something horrible like that. I think we're all supportive of one another.

And it might be that you want to look for some positive, supportive people who you can interact with face to face – so maybe a local writers' circle. Or maybe it's not even specifically within the world of writing. It could be that if you're, say, working on a blog, you want to meet up with other people working online. Or it could be that you meet up with other creative people, so with artists or musicians as well as writers.

Whatever form this takes for you, it's about finding people who build you up, people who encourage you, so that when you go away from meeting up with them you don't feel flat and down, but instead you feel really fired up to achieve your goals.

#5: Take a Class or Course

Then the fifth thing, which I think ties in with this, is to take a class or a course. There's a lot you can learn by reading writing books, there's a lot you can learn by listening to seminars like this one, but I think to be physically in a classroom, or a coffee shop or someone's house or wherever it might be, with other writers, learning about a particular aspect of writing, is a really good and powerful thing.

You're setting aside the time to do it, and you might find that you think about things in a different way or you're motivated in a different way when you really take some time out from daily life. Particularly if that's on a regular basis, if you're really committed to something.

I'm certainly not suggesting that you have to go out and join a Masters programme on creative writing, but you may well find there's an evening class or workshop or something local to where you are. If that's not practical, you might want to take one of the mini-courses or full courses within Writers' Huddle and work through those systematically.

#6: Get Feedback on Your Writing

Then the sixth thing is to try and get some feedback. And as I mentioned earlier, published writers will not generally be thrilled if you write to them saying, "Hey, could you read my whole manuscript and tell me what you think?"

But there are other options for feedback. You can start a blog, as we've said, or you could enter writing competitions. And if you get, say, shortlisted in a competition, even if you don't get any actual feedback on your story, that's still useful feedback: you were good enough to make the shortlist.

When I've got a bit further than the shortlist in competitions (and I haven't done any competitions in quite a few years now) there's usually been a little bit of feedback in terms of the judges' comments. So maybe I learned that my characterisation was good, or that my plot was mostly nonexistent but the good bits of my story made up for that, and so on.

Something you could do if you've got a bit of money to spend is get an editor. There are loads of freelance editors out there who will edit your novel or short story or whatever it might be if you pay them.

So you don't need to go through an agent or find a publisher in order to have your work edited, you just need to be willing to pay for that service. And that's something I did with my novel *Lycopolis* – I mentioned my friend Lorna Fergusson earlier, who edited that. And it was really, really useful to have her feedback.

I've had similar feedback when I've done things like my creative writing Masters. I had some really good support from some excellent writers and tutors there, who really helped me to shape my draft material into something much better.

#7: Write Regularly

The final thing, the seventh thing, that I think every writer really has to do if they're going to make it, if they're going to see the success that they want to see, is to establish a regular writing habit.

Of course we all have times when life just goes pear-shaped and we need to take a break. That happens and that's fine. But **in general, I think you want to be writing on a pretty regular basis. Not necessarily daily, but maybe daily, or twice a week, or three times a week. Whatever's right for you.**

Otherwise, it's so easy to let months and months go by and you haven't really done any writing. I say this because it's happened to me quite often in my life as a writer.

This is why some writers find it helpful to do something like blogging. Even if their blog isn't going to be their primary outlet, it can be a good discipline to get in the habit of putting something up every week, say. So whatever a regular habit looks like for you, try to build that, try to foster that in your own life – because honestly, just writing on a regular basis will do far more for you and for your writing than any number of books or courses or classes, or chats with writers, or insider tips, or anything. You know, if you're not doing the writing then nothing else can really help you very much.

The Zero Days Challenge

This brings me on to a new challenge!

So well done to everyone who took part in the Winter Challenge over the last couple of months. I think we had a great set of people and lots of successes. I did pretty poorly myself – but I was impressed how well most of you did, and I'm hoping that we can carry on the Winter Challenge spirit a bit, and also

perhaps rope in a few Huddlers who fell by the wayside early on or who didn't join up for that.

So this is the new challenge, and thank you to Dana who inspired this. It's "No Zero Days." So what does that mean?

No Zero Days means no days when you write nothing, or you do nothing towards your writing. For me that means that every day I'm trying to do *something* towards my novel. Sometimes that's "write a thousand words of my novel." Sometimes that's "spend two minutes scribbling some notes in my notebook before I go to sleep." So long as I do something, hey, it counts.

The challenge that I'm setting myself, the challenge that I hope you'll join me in, is getting from now (late March) until Easter, with no zero days.

I've posted about this in the forum as well, so that you can sign up if you want to join in, but the idea is that **every day you do something toward your writing goal.**

And that might be that you decide you actually have to write some words on your blog, or your short story or your novel or whatever, it might be that you decide that thinking about it or talking about it or jotting down some notes on it or doing some research for it is enough, but come up with your definition of what counts, and [let us know here](#).

Some Encouragement

I just want to finish with a couple of final words of encouragement.

This is what Bill wrote towards the end of his post. He wrote, *"Don't listen to those who say it can't be done. That just means that they can't do it, and just want to discourage you from even trying."*

And I think there's some truth in this. I think some people can be very negative about writing and about succeeding as a writer, because they've tried and it hasn't worked out for them. And I have every sympathy with those people,

because it is very discouraging when you put everything into going for a goal and you don't get to where you want to be.

But I believe that everybody in the Huddle has the ability, the talent, the strength, the stamina to succeed as writers – in whatever form that success means to you.

Don't let somebody else set your definition of success. It's so easy to adopt somebody else's definition of success – to read another writer's goals on their blog and to feel that's what you should be doing.

You might end up thinking that success means that you've had a book published by a really big publisher, or something, or success means that your name is well known, or success means that you're making a certain amount of money from your writing.

Honestly, all that matters is that you are achieving the goals you want to achieve.

And I absolutely believe in you. I know that you have not only the talent to do it, but the resources in terms of your own strength, but also in terms of other people who you can rely on, and information that you can use.

And please make every use of the Huddle – if there's something you'd like to see in the Huddle that would help you, or there's something you'd like me to do differently that would help, please let me know, because I really want to see you take your writing as far as you possibly can and have the success that you deserve to have.

Don't let the naysayers get you down. Don't let jaded writers discourage you. There are so many opportunities out there right now for writers. There are so many different ways you can succeed, and it's just up to you to decide what you want and to go for it.

So I'll see you in the forums, and good luck.