

Rebel Writers

A new guide for writers offers this advice: Don't sweat the small stuff

BY CHERYL DELLECESE Queries, simultaneous submissions, SASEs.... If you're a freelance writer, you're probably well aware of how these mainstays of the publishing profession can be the bane of your existence. But they needn't be. A new guide for writers encourages freelancers to worry less about the formalities and, instead, pay more attention to what matters most: the writing and reporting.

The Renegade Writer: A Totally Unconventional Guide to Freelance Writing Success debunks many writing-submission myths and provides countless tips on finding success as a freelance writer. "The majority of books for freelancers push tired old 'rules,'" says coauthor Diana Burrell '88. "I have seen

more beginning freelance careers come to quick ends because writers get obsessed by how wide the margins should be on their query letters."

Burrell herself almost succumbed to perhaps one of the greatest myths of free-

lance writing: that it's nearly impossible to make a living at it. After graduating from Smith, she worked as an assistant at a small ad agency in Connecticut and then continually jumped agencies as she climbed the advertising/marketing success ladder. But more promotions meant less hands-on creativity, and Burrell's dream to write nagged at her more than ever. "The good news is that motivated me to change my life," she says. Burrell enrolled in a graduate writing program at Wesleyan University and gave her first article proposal to a fellow student, who was an editor at a regional magazine. A few weeks later, she had an assignment—despite the fact that her proposal was two pages long, single-spaced, and didn't come with an SASE.

Now a successful freelance writer (as is coauthor Linda Formichelli) living outside of Boston with her husband and toddler son, Burrell's credits include *Psychology Today*, *Parenting*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *The Writer*. She's also conducting workshops based on the book's concepts throughout New England, and, this winter, in Florida.

"Being a freelancer is always tough," admits Burrell. "But if you turn in solid, well-researched proposals, deliver interesting articles that are well-reported, and don't flake out during edits, you're doing great. If you go beyond that, you'll never hurt for work—and to find out how to do that, you've got to read our book!"

**The Renegade Writer:
A Totally Unconventional
Guide to Freelance
Writing Success**
Diana Burrell '88 and
Linda Formichelli
Marion Street Press
2003, \$14.95



Photograph by Kathleen Doohar

Delving into the Past

Jane Yolen '60 and her daughter investigate history's mysteries

BY JOAN AXELROD-CONTRADA Jane Yolen '60 was chatting with an editor friend about future projects when inspiration struck. She knew she wanted to collaborate with her daughter, Heidi Elisabet Yolen Stemple, and thought, "Heidi was a private investigator. Maybe we could do something about solving history's mysteries."

Three books later, her idea has taken off. The mother-daughter duo has just released *Roanoke, the Lost Colony*, which delves into the disappearance of an English settlement in the late 1500s. The two previous books in what they call their "Unsolved Mystery from History" series explore the mysteries behind the ghost ship *The Mary Celeste* and children supposedly raised by wolves. Future topics will include Salem witchcraft and Amelia Earhart.

The prolific 64-year-old Yolen has authored some 250 books in the course of her career. Along the way, her books have racked up numerous awards: The Caldecott Medal, the World Fantasy Award, and the Jewish Book Award, among them. In May Yolen received an honorary degree

from Smith. She also has mentored many young people, including her own three children.

Stemple, 37, says people are always telling her, "I could never work with my mother." She tells them, "But you could work with my mother."

Twenty years ago, when Stemple was in her sassy teenage phase, she might not have been so quick with praise. Then she went off to college in Florida, established a life for herself in South Carolina, and became a parent herself. Last fall, Stemple moved back home to Hatfield, Massachusetts.

These days, mother and daughter banter nonstop and finish each other's sentences even though they possess vastly different styles as writers. Yolen gravitates toward the lush and romantic. Stemple says she is more "just the facts, ma'am." The series, though, has melded their styles and helped Stemple mature as a writer.

Yolen credits the collaboration with broadening and deepening her relationship with her daughter. "It gives the love another kind of focus," she says. "We're not just talking about kids and the day-to-day stuff."

Roanoke: The Lost Colony

Jane Yolen '60 and Heidi Elisabet Yolen Stemple; Roger Roth (illustrator)
Simon & Schuster
2003; \$16.95

Jane Yolen '60 and her daughter, Heidi Elisabet Yolen Stemple, display their work.



Freelance writers get too hung up on "tired" rules, says author Diana Burrell '88. She'd rather see freelancers focus on the quality of their writing and reporting.