



Q : How much time transpired from the time you decided to write *How to Submit* to holding the published book in your hands? (I sense you might be a fast writer.) What phase was the most fun, and what phase was the most challenging?

A: Your sense is right! I don't think of myself as a fast writer, but looking back it turns out I wrote most of

the book in 9 months. That's wild for me to reflect on. I was definitely in a fever to bring *How to Submit* to completion, once I got going.

The hardest part was before that, when I was waiting to start after I'd sold the book. I have never had that feeling before: knowing it will be published, but not having actually written most of it yet. It took me about two months to get over myself (particularly my fear of disappointing the editors!) and really start writing.

The most fun was the beginning, when the idea first burst forth. I had to write the first three chapters for the proposal without knowing it would be published, and the sense of possibility lit me up. The writing was like a magnet. I remember hunching in the laundry room of my sister-in-law's house over Christmas, typing and thinking to myself, "This might work. This might really work!"

Q: Are there any changes you wish you had made in your literary career to date?

A: I try not to believe in regrets, since all the things I've done wrong make me who I am now. But I definitely have lots of them! The main thing I wish is that I had been more patient with my writing and with myself—letting pieces marinate for longer before submitting them, and allowing more writing never to see the light.

I also wish I had understood earlier that sometimes rejection is a matter of quality, but sometimes it is because an editor just doesn't get what you're doing. I'm worthwhile! I'm good! Not perfect, but good, and being able to tell myself that has taken a long time. That said, everything I write doesn't have to be good! Just one thing every once in a while, or maybe several if I get lucky.

Q: I have found the submittal process depleting, so I was super excited to read your perspective about approaching it with joy. Could you share a few energizing approaches for Q&A readers?

A: Start by recognizing the human being on the other side of the email, submission form, or manila envelope with your submission tucked inside. It's hard to see that person through all the mediation, but they're there! And they have loves, fears, and hopes, just like you do. Every time you send a submission, it's an act of faith in human connection. Trust that the connection is there, even if a form response makes you forget about it temporarily.

Also remember that you don't have to wait for acceptance to be a part of the conversation. There are so many ways to get involved now, so your legitimacy as a writer and as part of the literary community aren't dependent on publication. Reading widely and enthusiastically is one way to do that; so is joining a class or writing group; so is getting involved as a reader or editor with a publication. Then, when you get published, it won't feel like a dam is breaking. You're already in the water!

Q: You talk about the importance of community and connecting with your audience. Where are the top three, or so, communities you feel you have the most connection in? How did you make a strong connection with them?

A: Cross-genre and hybrid writing communities have meant a lot to me: people who live and write in the gaps between the most commonly accepted styles of narrative. When your story itself needs the margins to thrive, it means a lot to meet other writers who have a similar experience—and who have themselves charted paths across and through genre.

Fellow writers and non-writers with chronic illnesses have been central to my journey. I have ulcerative colitis and it's played a major role in my life and who I am, so meeting others who have similar points of resonance is incredibly heartening. It's the idea of "access intimacy:" when you meet someone else who just *knows*, you are automatically in community. You don't even have to say a word.

I also love my colleagues and students at Amherst College, my most immediate physical community

right now. They have so much heart, and they have taught me so much about what it means to show up for each other. We have to be vulnerable together, and we have to be strong for each other when the time comes. That give and take is the vibrant tension at the heart of community, I think.

Q: What did you learn about yourself writing *How to Submit*?

A: I learned that I have a lot to give beyond expertise and experience. There's a place beyond knowledge—a heart place—that was activated for me in writing a how-to book, which I didn't fully know until I began writing and teaching about this subject.

I'm not sure where this heart place will take me yet, but I do know that when I show up for others and help build a space for our shared vulnerability, creativity, and desire, powerful things can happen. Co-creating that energy with other people has meant a lot to me in the last few years, and I am curious what it will feel like to open further to it in the years to come.

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