

A DIVA'S CHRONICLES...



PERSERVERANCE: The name of the Game

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In an industry like writing, perseverance isn't always the easiest feat to accomplish. How many people have you talked to who have said they wanted to write a book? I've seen a lot of friends, family, coworkers who have told me time and time again that they have a story idea they want to pursue. Or if not a specific idea, they have the urge to write something.

Of course, not all of the people who want to write will persist and flesh out a grain of an idea into a story arc large enough to fill a book.

And of those people, how many will actually start writing?

And then of those people, how many will finish it?

If you've written an entire novel, you should be proud of yourself. Seriously! You've shown tenacity that most people will never achieve. You've carved out a large chunk of time, which most likely you've had to sacrifice from something else—maybe from family, from other avenues of entertainment, from work, or from precious sleep. You've spent countless hours oscillating between a glorious outpouring of words (if you're lucky!) to a painful, one-word-at-a-time, delete-as-much-as-I-write type of production.

I'd like to share my story of perseverance. Hopefully, it will inspire you to keep moving forward in your own career path and not to give up.



My first novel (an adult chick lit) took about a year and a half to write—I started it in the summer of 2004. I wrote the first 5 chapters, then stopped because of “writer’s block”: basically, I didn’t like the direction the story was going in and had no idea what to do to fix it.

And I didn’t write for a full year because of it.

It wasn’t until I signed up to do National November Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), a challenge that encourages you to finish 50,000 words on a novel in one month, that I forced myself to jump back in and just do it. Once I realized I was trying to force the novel in the wrong direction, I was able to complete the book in November 2005 and polish it to a spit-shine.

Then came the hard part—submitting. I sent that novel out to over 100 agents and a couple of publishers over the course of 6 months and had no offers of representation. It was painful, getting rejection after rejection. You should see the file folder I have of all of them, haha. But I didn’t give up.

See, for me, I knew I was going to make it in this industry if I played the game right. While I’m not the best writer ever, I know I can write a high-concept novel, and I’m pretty good at humor and romance.

So, I submitted that first novel to a small electronic press (which did publish it as an e-book) and moved on to a new idea, one that I thought would likely have a better chance at garnering an agent and hopefully a print publisher. It was about a girl who became a ghost and had to do some good deeds so she could cross over—and it was YA, something I hadn’t realized I’d enjoy reading and writing until a writer friend of mine told me I had to give it a try. And boy, was I glad I did! It was a whole new world, now opened up to me. In YA, I could explore unusual and fun themes, storylines, and voices I hadn’t dreamed possible.

I completed my second novel in 3 months (it’s much easier to write once you actually know what you’re doing, haha) and in August 2006, I started submitting it out to agents. I got an offer of representation in January 2007, which was followed by 4 more offers. I was able to interview all of them over the phone and choose who I thought would work best with me.

My perseverance had paid off, and in a big way. If I’d given up after the first novel, I wouldn’t have gotten my agent (who is totally awesome, yay!).

With my agent’s help, I polished that novel, and she sent it out into the wild blue yonder. It received some interest, but no real bites. But rather than hang my career on that one story, waiting and hoping someone would buy it, I kept moving forward.

During the spring of 2007, I wrote and polished my third novel, a YA about a teenager who became a cupid for her school. We started subbing it during the summer of 2007.

This third book had two editors who really liked the concept, but each wanted a massive rewrite. Editor one wanted it to be rewritten to have more of a “hardcover” feel, so I would have to change the tone and voice to make it more serious and emotional. Editor two liked it as a romantic comedy/chick lit, but felt the story would work better as a trilogy. Neither editor was

giving me a contract to do the rewrites, as they wanted to see what I'd do with it first (a very common situation).

It was a hard decision on which way to go, because I felt I'd be treated right at both places, should they like what I did with the rewrites. But in the end, my agent and I decided the trilogy idea was the better option—that editor loved my voice as-is and wanted to see the story expanded into three novels, something I felt I could tackle.

So, I redid the concept: I wrote the first 50 pages of what would be book 1, then wrote synopses for all three books (what I'd originally written would now become book 2). Then, we turned it in and waited.

The trilogy proposal went to acquisitions on Valentine's Day of 2008 (tell me that's not serendipity!), and the books were given the thumbs up. I'd sold to Simon Pulse! Book one would come out December 2009, with books 2 and 3 following just a few months after.

Three novels. Three and a half years of struggles. Revisions. Rejections. Close calls. Tears. Laughs. Angst. Sheer bliss.

If I'd given up after not selling my first YA (which is still being subbed, by the way), I wouldn't have gotten here. I wouldn't have achieved my goal.

Of course, I'm not done yet. I'm currently trying to create a proposal that my editor and I will love for my next story after the trilogy. But I have enough resolve to keep going until we hit that sweet spot again.

After all, I'm in it for the long haul. And hopefully, so are you!



About RHONDA STAPLETON:

Rhonda Stapleton started writing a few years ago to appease the voices in her head. She has a Master's degree in English and a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. In the twelve minutes of free time she has each day, Rhonda enjoys reading, photography, writing poetry, singing in the shower (and in the car, at work, or basically anywhere that provides oxygen), drinking chai tea, and playing on the Internet (AKA, connecting to the "mother ship"). Rhonda lives in northeast Ohio with her two kids, her manpanion, and their lazy dog. Stupid Cupid is her debut young adult novel, and is the first book in a trilogy. Visit her website at www.rhondastapleton.com.