

The writing life

After spending what seemed to be several lifetimes at school studying to be a writer, I must admit I was discouraged when I learned that the guy who wrote "Baby on Board" on a little yellow triangular sign made more money as a writer than Herman Melville, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and James Joyce put together.



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

I am most impressed that he made his money while he was alive. Artists, writers and composers historically enjoy posthumous success more often than not. However, it isn't fair to say that more music by Bach, Mozart, and Chopin was sold after they were dead than when they were alive, because recorded music, concert tours, blood-sucking agents, managers, producers and air-headed groupies had yet to be invented. Anyone wanting to hear Bach when he was alive had to go to Germany.

Nonetheless, Elvis Presley sold 200 million recordings the year after his death, more than any year when he was alive, which gives credence to the creative set being worth more dead than alive, no matter when they lived. That being the sentiment of most of their spouses, I am surprised that more are not murdered.

Anyway, the romance and glamour of my initial dream of being a career novelist quickly went to the wayside when a professor told my class that less than two percent of people who write for a living are even modestly successful fiction writers. At the time, the idea of being paid to lie sounded like a cool idea, but the odds of actually selling a work of fiction made the need for a steady job a reality.

I was pursuing employment as a political speechwriter, because that's close to writing fiction, when the nuttiest guy in my writing class landed a job working for a tabloid. His employer paid him handsomely for making stuff up about celebrities that was just to the right of being illegal. As long as the paper wasn't sued, and people kept

buying his lies, he was allowed to write anything he wanted.

One of his stories was about the possibility of Richard Simmons being a secret weapon used by terrorists to torture the chronically overweight and brain-dead by leading them to believe they could "Sweat to the Oldies" until they miraculously became slender and attractive. Oddly, his readers found the subject fascinating. Unfortunately, his hypothesis had merit. Simmons' groupies actually believed the gender-defying guru of gelatinous flab and spent real money on his weight-loss videos, which proves the inventiveness of terrorists knows no bounds.

Nevertheless, my writer friend still had this fabulous, though sleazy, job of lying about whatever he wanted as long as readers kept buying the paper. After thinking about it, I felt I had no right to criticize his tabloid mindset when I was being paid to pen political speeches — the undisputed ultimate lies. So I decided to move up the food chain a notch and become a columnist.

For the most part, the only difference between columnists and tabloid writers is that columnists are published in real newspapers, and if they are a bit lucky and good, the possibility of syndication is always a bonus. Tabloids tend to limit their writers to one paper. Good liars are coveted and they keep them to themselves.

I find column writing to be therapeutic. Columnists more or less have the freedom of writing about any subject they like as long as sex, religion, and politics are not involved to the extreme. Con-

sequently, we can rant about anything and everything that annoys us and get it off our chest with little opposition. Although it's therapy for us, it causes publishers and editors acute anxiety and other strange diseases, which creates work for real therapists, and I figure that's a good thing.

Writing a column can also be used to pave the way to more lucrative careers. For instance, I could use my experience as a political speechwriter and introduce possible legislative ideas that I think would be appealing to the voting public. If they are well-received, I could include them in a political platform to get elected to high office, where I would be generously paid for doing what I always wanted to do — lie for a living.

I would promise things like: "If I am elected to office, I will introduce Bari's Law number 1001. Any person caught shopping while their half-filled cart is in line at the cash register will be sentenced to rotting in prison for life where they will stand last in line for everything including meals, showers, telephone privileges, etc., etc., blah-blah-blah."

However, there is one drawback. Readers might take me seriously, and if I were elected to office, I would be an integral part of the system that we can't understand.

Island history

Continued from previous page

Tuesday of the nearly completed new Jamestown Bridge that took them down inside the concrete span's hollow center section.

This summer's exhibit at the Jamestown Museum, "Back to the Forties," showcases a dynamic and dramatic 10-year period of island life.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, June 26, 1997

Residents on the municipal water system must restrict their outdoor water use to odd or even days.

A Town Council action Monday night eliminated 25 parking spaces along Conanicus and Walcott avenues at East Ferry.

The Jamestown School graduated 62 eighth-grade students in an outdoor ceremony last Friday evening.

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