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Essay by Janet Garber

The Odds Are Against Us, but a Hit Is a Thrill



What a sick game we writers play. Craving acceptance, not for ourselves, but for our babies, we tirelessly toss off stories, poems, creative nonfiction, and launch them into the void, praying that one or two bounce back with smiley faces. *Wonderful! Such language! Never have I read...*

What a jolt when one of our creations hits. The high surpasses anything I have experienced on the work front as an executive. Why should an anthology publishing a spooky story I wrote last month overshadow accomplishments of a long and fruitful executive career? Oh, I see—acceptance of my words, words I wrote myself from the heart and soul, has *weight*. I allow it to mean that (a) I am a talented writer; (b) I am a good person; and (c) I am worthy.

This is blatantly ridiculous. Right? Why should some editor's opinion matter so much? The editor most likely is decades younger than I am, in possession of much less in the way of experience and perhaps education and—how shall I put it?—wisdom. Yet, I place my life in his or her hands, and I'm certainly not alone.

How many acceptances will be enough, Janet?

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Long ago, a psych-major friend asked me why I needed this type of validation. I suppose I didn't get enough encouragement during my childhood...or I'm weak or...I simply have no idea. What I do know is that I'm now fully entrenched in the 2016 writers' game: I submit (interesting word!) my work. I wait (sometimes six or eight months). As soon as a piece is rejected, I submit more of the same to other outlets. I do collect acceptances here and there, rejoice mightily for a few hours, but self-doubt always creeps back in.

Dinky Doo Journal is not one of the top literary journals. (See Groucho Marx's famous quip: I wouldn't want to be a part of any club that would have me.) DDJ in fact will probably fold within the year. They're not even paying me. Am I even breaking even with submission fees to journals and contests?

Last year, out of 171 submissions, I received 6 acceptances. Not even four percent. In 2016, I'm running closer to nine percent, probably because I'm including essays. (I like essays.)

Would I accept such poor return on investment in any other area of my life? No. Worse yet, I'm far from a newcomer. I've had quite a bit of success over the years with articles and essays. I've been published by the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Post*, *Working Woman Magazine*; many trade journals and local papers; online book and movie review websites. Back in 2001, my nonfiction book *I Need a Job, Now What?* was reissued as *Getting a Job* in paperback and on audiotape.

And yet, I live for the thrill of getting a short story accepted. Today, all that counts in my mind is fiction, perhaps because it poses the most challenge. There's so much I still have to learn about the mechanics of crafting a good and powerful story.

I stop myself from time to time to question: What are my goals? Let's see. I'd like to pull together the threads of a novel about a Franco-American couple and their baby living in Paris in the seventies, gather some of my stories into an anthology, and maybe do the same for some of the career essays I published in the nineties that are still relevant. I'd like to wake up each morning with a phrase in my head and beeline over to my desk to see what sort of story or poem emerges. Oh—I'd like to never run out of ideas. I'd like to share my thoughts, insights, perceptions—to communicate all the beautiful and wondrous things in life to my readers.

How many acceptances, Janet, will be enough?

Then I look over at Stephen King and Joyce Carol Oates and J.K. Rowling. I think of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and the rest of the troubadours from the sixties and seventies who won't quit the stage. And I know I'm in good company. I can't quit yet. I gather my writing buddies around me for warmth and continue the struggle, fight the good fight, no matter how illogical it may at times seem to be.

This year, I went against the grain—my grain, anyway—and self-published my novel. No waiting around for agents to respond, no pitching, no getting down on my knees and begging. No rejections. I knew that I had to get this baby on the road without delay. After a few decades lying in disarray in my bottom drawer, *Dream Job, Wacky Adventures of an HR Manager* was in no condition for stalling tactics. A wait of two years or more could not be envisaged. I took the leap and reap the benefits. Now, I hover over my Amazon page waiting for readers to comment, living or dying on their praise or censure.

How many acceptances will be enough? I'll let you know when I get there.

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A Ph.D./English Lit dropout from the University of Rochester, Janet deserted academia in favor of several years of wide-eyed adventure in Mexico and France with hubby #1—such good material!—before returning to metro New York City. She’s published fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, articles, and reviews. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *When Women Waken*, *Minerva Rising*, *Contraposition*, and a score of other literary journals.

Silver Lining Press published her nonfiction book *I Need a Job, Now What?* in 2001. Her comic novel *Dream Job, Wacky Adventures of an HR Manager* debuted in March 2016.

For more information, visit her website, [Welcome to Planet Janet](http://www.janetgarber.com) [6].

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