



The Life of a Writer

Being a writer is a good life. You get to work on your own. There is no boss over you cracking the whip, unless that is actually what you are looking for. You make a good salary for the time you put in. For example, I have personally made over \$700 in just a few short decades. You can't argue with that kind of dough.

How can you break in on this action? You could try writing an inspirational story, about how someone overcomes impossible odds, like the guy who was born with no neck but went on to become offensive tackle for the Minnesota Vikings. I have an idea for an inspirational story called *Diamond in the Rough*. It's about a man who can't get anywhere in life, until one day he is down in the cellar, sifting out the cat litter boxes, and he finds a diamond buried amongst the other debris. How did it get there? That's the inspirational part. Apparently his cat Fluffy ate it accidentally. This idea has been copyrighted, so don't get any ideas.

You could also try writing a play, like *Death of a Sales Rep*. If you are in a really bad mood, and have been for a couple of years, this might be your genre. You could also write the unauthorized biography of somebody famous. "Unauthorized" means you make it all up. And you might try joining the Heaving Bosom Romance Writers of America. It is a good group, and they have a picnic once a year, with sandwiches and coleslaw. Then they talk shop. You can always leave when that happens.

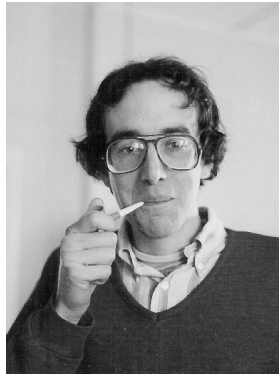
Every good book should have some controversial ideas. What if you could prove that not only was Jesus a married man and the father of several children, but that he was also an avid golfer? That would be something.

The most important part of any book is the title. *Ignorance for Dummies* is a good one. Also there should be a lot of sexy parts, like "Mary was a knockout in her fishnet stockings and pelican briefs." That will keep everybody reading.

Here's a surefire idea for a hit book. It will be called *The Pez Diet*. The subtitle is *How to Lose Thirty Pounds in Thirty Days, and \$19.95 in One Day*, by (you). All you have to do now is deposit the checks.

Writing poetry is a good way to make a living. You don't have to think of rhymes anymore, so it is pretty easy. Plus there is usually a dental plan.

You could submit something you wrote to a major magazine. Print it out, cram it in an envelope, and look up their address. They are dying to hear from you. Seriously, if they don't see your envelope soon, they might pass away. You don't want that on your conscience.



The author practicing looking like a writer, 1979

Another idea is to write a blog. All you need is opinions. The world is waiting. You push the send button, and they shoot out into cyberspace. And there they are.

You have to keep your writing skills sharp. One time I tried taking a writing workshop in Vermont, a weeklong seminar way out in the country. There were actual writers there to teach us the tricks of the trade. The first day a student described his novel in progress. Everybody said fantastic, can't miss, go for it, and excellent work so far.

Were these people out of their skulls? You could get better writing from a mosquito, if you gave it a grant and a small enough pen. So, the second day I switched to tennis. I improved my backhand and learned how to put spin on my serve. These skills have stayed with me.

With all the changes in publishing, especially publishing on demand, anyone can put out a book. Lots of people feel like they have a book inside of them. But "throw up" is inside of them too. I'm just saying.

Any good book has tension. There has to be a battle: good versus evil, or Leno versus O'Brien. You need characters people care about, like the guy from *Abs of Steel*. What a story that was. If you thought the TV show was good, try reading the book. Every story needs a hero, and he should wear a white baseball cap. He should prevail in the end, unless you are telling a true story.

It is important to set the scene so the readers know where they are. The readers should be able to smell the pea soup, and see the fog so thick you could cut it with a fog-cutting utensil. Off in the distance, a foghorn is moaning, like a guy opening an overdraft statement from the bank. It all starts to make sense.

It is good to read the classics, the old standbys you read in English class. I have given up on some of them. All right, all of them. I tried my best with *Moby Dick*, but there was too much whaling and gnashing of teeth. And what about *The Once and Future King*? The only thing I know about that book is I carried it

back and forth to high school for months on end. I should at least have big muscles, but that didn't happen.

In high school we read and analyzed many short stories. We had to figure out what the motivation of a character was. Why did he do what he did? Maybe he didn't feel well. That would explain a lot.

People don't read as much as they used to. They are all on the computer playing the popular game *Kill Everybody Now*. But there will always be writers who heed the urge to put their thoughts down on the old Dell screen. They can't resist. Years go by. Their wives tell them to knock it off and get a job already. It is the age-old battle. Somebody should write a book about it.



Economics

There was some bad economic news today. They say that housing starts were way down again last month. It's a bad feeling when you get up in the morning, get yourself dressed and ready to go to work, and then you realize that your house isn't going to start. You have to call the guy with the truck and jumper cables. It's a big hassle.

Economics is a big part of life. Basically, it means how much money you have. Some people want to be billionaires. I say, why stop there? I'd like to own the whole planet. Even then I wouldn't be satisfied and I'd be wondering if the moon was for sale and how much they want for it. Once you start setting goals there is no end to it.

"Monopoly" is a good game. You get to watch your friends and family go bankrupt. They ask for mercy, and you say "Mercy? Not today, my brothers and sisters. That will be three thousand dollars, and don't tell me you can't afford it. You should have thought of that before you spent the night on Boardwalk." Their pleas amuse you; their suffering makes you laugh. That's pretty much what it's like to be a landlord, and it's good training for the youngsters.

If you do actually make some money, there are many good causes that you should give it to, such as The International Home for Pancakes. If you don't help out, who will?

Have you ever wondered about gas prices? I mean the .9 at the end of the price. What is the deal with this 9 tenths of a cent?

When you give the guy a penny, why don't you get some change? Well, it turns out that if you ask him, the guy will give you a little coin called a centillo. It is smaller than a dime, and it's worth a tenth of a cent. They are only available at gas stations. I am building up a collection, and a few years from now I will cash the whole pile in and buy an ice cream cone. A word to the wise.

Many people take their paycheck to the food store to buy some groceries for the week. Here's an idea: maybe we could skip the middleman, and just use edible currency. The bank tellers could slice it off by the pound. Remember, you heard it here first.

Everybody wants to beat the system. They want a way to be rich without doing any work. You see the ads on TV, with the people who make tens of thousands a month, which they arrange in a fan shape and use to cool themselves, while servants drop pretzels into their open mouths. But how do they do it?

Most of these schemes involve either pornography or land lording, which are basically the same thing. These are two sure-fire ways to make your stack and retire to your jewel-encrusted home in Florida, where you will spend your days on the golf course, and your nights in white satin. So what other ways are there for you to strike it rich without actually doing any work?

Win the lottery. Relax, take your time, and pick good numbers. Lots of people with no more skill than you have done it. Scientists and other naysayers will tell you that your odds of hitting the lottery are less than the odds of being hit by lightning. But I've had some mighty close calls with lightning bolts. How about the time I was camping out in South Dakota? I'd still be screaming now, but I ran out of breath and had to stop to inhale.

Inherit. This is the time honored, sure-fire way to go. The next time you are getting ready to come down to earth and start an incarnation, BE SURE TO CHECK THE RELATIVES.

Marry a rich person. In dreams, anything is possible.

Day trading. For example, you could trade a Monday for a Saturday. Big profits for you.

Do something illegal. You can't beat criminal activity for high profit margins. The downside is going to jail. From what I can see on TV, it's even worse than my house.

Start a doomsday cult, and make yourself supreme leader. Everybody has to give you all their money, plus the women folk have to mate with you. It's a good deal.

Get a monthly government check. On the way home, buy some Cheetos.

Go back in time, and buy Apple Computer at 25 cents a share. Be sure to bring some quarters with you.

And finally, Give seminars on How to Beat the System. By the time people realize you don't have a clue, it will be too late. They already paid.



Still life with sliced money



The Big Sneeze

I went into an office today to pay a bill. The lady behind the desk did a really big sneeze. She is one those people who contain their sneezes, so she stifled it all the way down to zero. The sneeze still happened, but it was all internal. Afterwards a little puff of smoke came out of each ear. I was afraid one of her eyeballs might pop out. That's a lot of pressure to be stifling.

I know we are supposed to be worried about germs, and the swine virus, which has nothing to do with pigs, but gerbil virus sounded dumb, so that's what it's called. We are all doing our part to prevent disease from spreading. But I think she went too far. Her head could have exploded. I'd rather see a few germs out there than see that.

On top of that, she excused herself. For what? Nothing happened, out where I was. I didn't forgive or bless her. We don't bless people in our family for sneezing. We don't consider a sneeze to be a religious event. We are sneeze atheists. Plus we are big sneezers so we would have spent half the day blessing and greeting each other in German. My brother does a lot of sneezing every morning. He doesn't excuse himself, and he would rather not be blessed. Fine.

Instead of stifling their sneeze, some people go to the other extreme, and do a sneeze/scream combination. It's one of the few times they can yell in public, so they go for it, and we congratulate them.

I know a married couple in Vermont, and they have four dogs. Whenever one of the humans sneezes, the dogs go crazy. They bark, run around the house, and make a racket. So these people try not to sneeze. They also recommend to visitors that it might be best not to sneeze. You can't always help it. Sometimes a sneeze just comes over you, like love or indigestion, and there's nothing you can do about it. Other sneezes are optional, and they are under your control.

Scientists say that you can't sneeze while you are asleep, but we have no way of knowing if they are right. Some sneezes have been clocked at 50 miles per hour, which means you could get a ticket if you are caught sneezing in our town.

In ancient times, it was believed that a sneeze was a sign from the gods. "Blow your nose, son," they seemed to be saying. I wish we would get direct instructions like that now. Many cultures believe that a sneeze is a sign that someone is thinking about you. If you have a sneeze attack during a classical music concert, it means that people hate you.

It is up to you how many sneezes you do at any one time. It's a matter of style. I like to sneeze in pairs. The first is an intro, and the second is the commentary. My friend Tom sneezes at least six times in a row. Once he starts, you know a bunch more are coming. You have to stop what you're doing and wait for it to end. Sometimes he can go as high as a dozen.

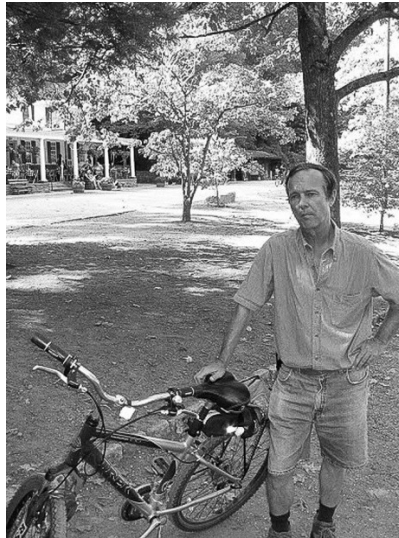
He had a job in an office, and once he sneezed, everybody gathered around his cubicle and counted out loud as his sneeze series progressed. They clapped, cheered, and counted along. This is why people buy automatic weapons, and bring them into the office. "He seemed like such a nice fellow," everybody says later. "We don't know what got into him."

I wonder how many people have crashed their cars or fallen from mountains because of a sneeze. I think you lose consciousness during a sneeze. When you come to again, you have to straighten out your car, or make sure you are still holding the rope if you are up on a mountain. What if a pilot has to sneeze while he

is landing the plane? This is called “turbulence” in the aviation industry, and it’s why they have seat belts. By the way, when the steward comes by, tell him you want your pretzels “rare.” They love that joke.

When my friend Phil was in junior high, he was vice president of his class. He was up on stage at an assembly. Suddenly he sneezed. Something came out of his nose, and hung there. Most people would have wiped it away with a tissue, ski hat, or science book. Phil decided to leave it there, swaying in the breeze. Phil acted like everything was normal. Other class officers were trying not to laugh, but what chance did they have? Phil was a performance artist.

Sneezing is a fact of life. Everybody does it. Some people sneeze when they go out in direct sunlight. Some sneeze when they have eaten a big meal. I only sneeze when someone is thinking about me, or when the gods are trying to tell me to blow my nose. It’s a strict policy.



Tom, multiple sneezer

