

Insights of an Independent Author with Heather Shannon



Heather Shannon is many things: a mother, a spiritual apprentice, an HR expert, and an artist, but most importantly, **she is an author**. She has battled two decade's worth of writer's block and creative burnout, working tirelessly towards completing her **scifi-fantasy** novels and a variety of creative **short stories**.

Heather shares with us the vulnerable aspects of being a self-published author and the hurdles one must overcome to find success in our field.

What are some of the main challenges you have faced as a self-published/employed author?

Being an author seems like the **dream job** for an introvert... But all that quiet can lead to **doubt**, questions of worth, and fear of failure. Pushing past those emotions has taken a lot of work, and realizing that **I am my only setback**, is eye-opening.

I love to write, but I **struggle to see** my work from that much-needed **non-emotional lens** that can see where the holes are, what structures need stabilizing, what characters are weak, and the overall pace of the story.

Marketing and selling my work is another main challenge, being able to see myself and my brand is not easy, **I am still finding my way and what works for me**.

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What were your motivations for self-publishing rather than working with a publishing house?

The **control over my work** is a key factor. With the push of a button, you can publish your work, send it out into the world, and call yourself an author. Years ago, the publishing houses helped to establish a new author, taking on the marketing, setting up book tours and whatnot. These days, they are more likely to look at an author who is already **established** with a **reader community**, one who has a **social media following** and is eager to help promote and buy the books. If that is the expectation, why would I give up the control and rights to my work, after working so hard to create a platform for my readers?

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What do you look for in an editor before publishing?

I need an editor who **isn't afraid to speak the truth** but is understanding enough to get that most authors are soft squishy beings on the inside and are **protective** of their work.

But my editor must be able to tell me what is working, what's not working, and then **work with me** on a plan to fix it.

I don't expect my editor to wave a magic wand and bobbity-boo it's perfect, but I do expect their **collaboration** to make the book the best it can be.

What are some impactful things you have learnt from some motivational writing courses that couldn't be found in the average online resource?

That **writing is not a solo endeavour**, the writer's community is vast, and we should work with each other to **support, amplify** our voices, and **cheer** each other on.

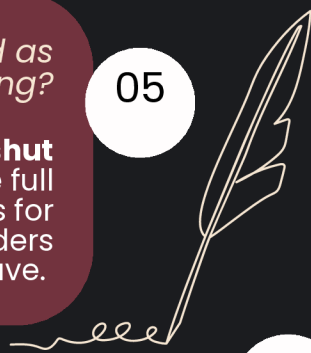
I've also learned that each story has its own **voice or spirit**, and tuning into that spiritual aspect brings so much more life to the work. I don't just mean the voices of the characters, but the overall story too. When a story grinds to a halt, it often means that **I've stopped listening to the spirit of the story**, and I need to **tune back in**.

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How would you say your endeavours into the spiritual self may have acted as a foundation for your fictional writing?

Spirit is in everything we do, touch, see, and feel. By tuning out from spirit, we **shut ourselves off** from our emotions, which **dulls our experiences**. By taking in the full experience of life, and what lessons it has to offer, I can now use that as a basis for the experiences my characters will have and ultimately the experience the readers will have.

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You also have been working towards having a diverse cast within your stories, could you explain your process of researching diverse identities?

I read as much as I can from many different authors. Whether it is their works, social media, or their blogs, these are great ways to educate myself on the views of others. Feeling and seeing their views of the world helps me to **see the world from a new set of eyes**. I only know what I have experienced myself, but by immersing myself in the lives of others, I can better understand where they are coming from. Above that, I **talk** to people, **share** experiences, and **ask** questions.



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What concerns might you have as an author before you feel ready to publish a piece of writing? Does editing play a large part in it?

Is the story **structurally sound**? Do the characters **impact** the story in a meaningful way, are they **relatable**? Does the story make sense? Is it **paced** well, where does it lag or drop or kick people out? Does it **ride that realism line** just enough that it doesn't kick the reader out? Will my defined reader group **connect** with this story? Is it any good? I don't really care about whether it makes money, or sells well. My hope is always that the readers will connect to it and find it **interesting enough to finish** it.

These are all the questions that run through my head as I read through my latest edits. So, yes, editing plays a huge part in it. **The ultimate goal is when I can say, I love this book**, and my reader can say, Hey, have you read this book? It was so good, you have to read it!

"As someone getting into the field of writing and editing, understand that it is a journey-...-At least half of the reader population will hate the end work, but that other half is who we are here for."