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The Rule of Firsts for Beginning Novelists

A few weeks ago, I had coffee with a new writer, who's working on her first novel. Our time was fueled with her enthusiasm and questions. Lots and lots of questions.

Her questions reminded me of, well, me when I was a newbie novelist. She asked about so many of the things I didn't know back when I moved to the "Dark Side" of the writing road as I transitioned from writing nonfiction to fiction.

There was so much I didn't know. About writing, About the industry. About myself. And even about how things should happen in a certain order to get the best results.

There's a method to this writing madness, you ask? Why yes, yes, there is. Let me introduce you to my "Rule of Firsts."

• **Craft first: Write the best book you can.** Setting our sights on writing the best book we can starts all the way back at the beginning of our writing journey — with the first book we write — and never stops. As we become a "real" writer, we just add more things to our writing To Do list:

- *Write the best book I can.*
- *Find an agent.*
- *Find a publisher.*
- *Edit.*
- *Market.*
- *And repeat, repeat, repeat the writing, editing, marketing parts.*

Here's a hint: You're a "real" writer long before you sign a contract. Think attitude, not accomplishments. And with every book you write, you are always writing the (next) best book you can.

• **Relationships first: It is who you know, not who you use in this business.** Nobody should ever be used as a stepping stone on our journey to success. The publishing world is a community and yes, people do give recommendations both favorable and not so favorable. We're building our writing reputation not just by the words we write

but also by the ones we speak, as well as by our actions toward others. Kindness and respect matters with other writers and editors and agents, too.

• **Community first: Craft + Relationships = Community.** Writers need others writers. Why? Because we “get” each other. Nobody talks story with us like another writer. Nobody brainstorms with us like another writer. My new writer-friend talked about how she’d revised her story eight times. How a friend who was an avid reader was giving her feedback. But I encouraged her to connect with a writing community like My Book Therapy. To attend some writers conferences. Writers need each other, and we also need to understand craft (see my first point), as well as the publishing industry. It’s great to read blogs like this one, but connecting with other writers face to face is so important because that’s where relationships are made.

Craft, Relationships, and Community: new writers need to know how important these things are. But you know what? More experienced writers need to be reminded about the Rule of Firsts, too.

How are you doing with the Rule of Firsts?

- Craft First
- Relationships First
- Community First