

From Writer to Author

By Lowvee Cole

I was three when my mother first taught me how to write. With a gentle twist and pull of her hand, she made the pencil point glide across the paper like a figure skater. Mind you, I'd seen thousands of words strung together in publications and on little Honey Do lists Mom left for Dad, but to actually see a word being formed by the human hand entranced me. Especially because Nicole (my true name) was the first word Mom taught me how to write. Those six letters strung together defined me. There was spunk and life in them. They told the story of a hazel-eyed girl with a love for Juice Newton, peanut butter cups, and a knack for finding trouble where one didn't think trouble existed. I'm still like that today, only now should someone sit me down in front of a chalkboard and I write the word *Poop*, I won't get my mouth washed out with soap!

After learning all kinds of fun words, my passion for writing exploded. I began composing mini stories *a la See Spot Run*, which soon progressed into poetry and lyric writing. At the time, I was most passionate about lyrics because of the fearless way in which the singers crooned out their heartbreak. Something I didn't permit myself to do. Rather, I stowed my thoughts behind cryptic lines only Sherlock Holmes could decipher. Regardless, the words I penned became my lifeline for expressing myself without having to reveal my true thoughts. I soon set my words to music and recorded them, with dreams of making it big in the entertainment industry. While producers and fellow musicians alike found my work inspiring, ordinary listeners had trouble connecting with my songs because they didn't understand what I was trying to say. Still, I kept writing and recording in the same style, because I found solace in it.

Not until 2004, when I fell in love with J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, did I consider the possibility of novel writing. Cliché, I know, but it's the truth, so there you have it. I was never a fan of books. Every time I picked one up, I would get the itch to write, and inevitably set the text down, where it would collect dust on a shelf while I put my own thoughts to paper.

One day, while laid up in bed with tonsillitis, I found *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* on TV. This was the height of the Harry Potter craze, when everyone who was anyone was obsessing about the series. Potter trivia was in the news, in the lunchroom at work, and on the radio. Truthfully, it annoyed me. So I figured, *Why not watch this thing and see what all the fuss is about, prove that Harry Potter lovers are all a bunch of sheep, because no such fun can be found in a book?* Well, at the end of the movie, I joined the rest of the flock. J.K. Rowling had bewitched me body and soul. No other writer, aside from Tori Amos, had ever charmed me in such a way. I immediately called my husband at work and asked him to bring home all the Harry Potter books

available. (At the time, only five of the seven were published.) That night, I delved into the magical world of Harry Potter and didn't leave it until I'd ingested every. single. word. Then I read the books over again. And again. And again. . .

A year later, I gave birth to my second child and left my job to care for my family. Shortly thereafter, Rowling released *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*, in which Snape, my favorite character, killed Dumbledore, making him out to be as evil as Harry and everyone else at Hogwarts believed him to be. Knowing I would have to wait two years for Rowling to release the last book and prove them wrong, I chose to pen my own ending, *Harry Potter and the Battle of the Scourge*. My fan fic took me eight months to write, and miraculously, was legible to all who read it. For me, this was quite an accomplishment, putting my thoughts out there, clearly. I dismissed the idea I was only able to do so because the characters came from Rowling's head, not mine. This was her story. I merely fashioned an appropriate happy ending.

Then in 2006, I created Fantasy Fic World, a Harry Potter fan fiction site, where I posted my story and hosted the works of other talented fan fiction authors. At its peak, Fantasy Fic World was Yahoo's top five pick of the best Harry Potter Fan Fiction sites in the world. That accomplishment, combined with the wonderful feedback I received from hundreds of visitors about the site and my book, inspired me to set music to my lyrics "Till I Reason all My Love of You," which appear in *Harry Potter and the Battle of the Scourge*.

Soon thereafter, JK Rowling released *The Deathly Hallows*, delivering me the happy ending I hoped for: Harry defeated Voldemort and lived to tell the tale, and Snape was indeed a hero. Though, I was upset that she killed him off. Nevertheless, her work moved me to continue Harry's story with *The Shroud of Lethifold*, making Draco the Wizarding World's new bad guy. I was several chapters in when my mother pulled me aside and told me to stop wasting time on fan fiction and focus on my own creations. Heeding her advice, I shelved *The Shroud of Lethifold*, hung up Fantasy Fic World, and began penning my first album in eight years, *20 Till 2*, as well as my first novel, *Boundless Magick*, which at the time I'd titled *Abigail Stone and the Rise of the Dragon King*. I'd completed two chapters of *Boundless Magick*, when my music career took off. While my lyrics were still obscure, the music to which I set them was strong enough to make my listeners forgive me for it. Thrilled with the response, I tucked my book in my hope chest, knowing one that day I would find the time to complete it.

Sure enough, two years later, after my music success died down, I fished the manuscript out of its resting place, hunkered down at my computer, and began to type out what I planned to be the first book in a four-part series. (I've recently added a fifth.) It took me five years, dozens of rewrites, and a few outspoken test readers to tell me they needed a decoder pen to figure out what in hell I was trying to say until I got it right. In the end, I gave into my critics, kicked my fear out the window, and revised my work until my soul was literally oozing from every word.

Literally feeling naked in every sense of the word, I queried hundreds of agents, received a ton of positive feedback, a few brutal snubs, and several manuscript requests. In the end, the bulk response I got from agents who'd voiced an interest in my book were all the same: While they found my writing engaging and thoroughly enjoyed the story, it didn't stir within them the love-spark they needed to take on a five-part Wiccan series for years to come.

Determined to see *Boundless Magick* to print, I researched dozens of publishing agencies, eventually choosing to publish with Amazon's Createspace. Their service was free, they included advertising in their bundle, and they let me keep 70% of my profits. Not included in their free package was formatting and book design, both of which were costly. Since I was well versed in Photoshop and had all the necessary software at my disposal, I decided to do my own cover design and formatting. I read up on the How To's of publishing and even viewed a few Youtube tutorials. By November 2013, after many a trial and error, I'd designed, formatted, and published my own book, without shelling out a cent.

Boundless Magick went on to become an international Kindle bestseller. It only recently fell off the top 100 charts. I'm hoping to find the same, if not greater, success with book two, *The Hopi Mask*, which I'm currently penning. I'm also working on four books outside of my Wiccan series that range from Sci-Fi to YA romance. Further, I've just completed a Victorian period piece titled *The Masked Heir (Yes, I know, there's that mask word again!)*, with which I am currently querying. As with *Boundless Magick*, I will query until I exhaust all my resources, and if I fail to land an agent again, I know I can self-publish and find success.

It takes determination to make the transition from writer to author, as well as a passion for writing, a never-give-up attitude, and a willingness to heed your readers' advice and put yourself out there, no matter how silly your thoughts. It's something that took me decades to learn, and I'm still learning, but I wouldn't have it any other way.