



*Memoir
Writer's
Journey*

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Writer's Digest Conference East 2013 Take-aways: You Already Have Everything You Need

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Posted by Kathleen Pooler/[@kathypooler](#)

“Think of the readers who will love your story and believe that you already have everything you need to get your story to them” [Tayari Jones](#), Author of [Silver Sparrow](#) and closing keynote speaker for [The Writer’s Digest East Conference in NYC](#), 4/7/13

Writer’s conferences are a wonderful way to learn your craft, update yourself on industry trends and network with like-minded people. I usually find I get out what I put in and what I found in New York City at this year’s Writer’s Digest Conference was magical. Since this is my third WD conference, I went prepared to hone in on my specific needs—memoir revision, pitching, networking and listening to agents and publishers speak to ever-changing publishing options.

Two main take-aways:

1. Traditional and self-publishing are here to stay and can work together in peaceful coexistence with the emergence of hybrid publishing developing where an author chooses the combination of publishing options.

2. The changing role of the literary agent where “new routes to productivity and profit need to be explored” (Kristin Nelson, Literary Agent for Hugh Howey, Author of *Wool*.)

For a detailed discussion of this, please see Porter Anderson’s [Ether for Authors, “Who is Pitching Whom”](#)

In the end, it seemed to all boil down to putting your energies into writing a good story. Writing is the only way you will get published.

Here’s a few nuggets I gathered to share with you:



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- * “When doing a reading of your work, **create curiosity in the reader by reading from a point of high drama**. Honor your work by letting it speak for itself.” Journalist/Critic/Writer/Speaker [Porter Anderson](#), *Public Speaking for Writers: How to Turn Reading Into Book Sales* Boot Camp
- * **“Be an author entrepreneur**. Agents are partners with writers. The role is shifting and there are no gatekeepers.” Panel on *The Future of Publishing*
- * “Break into the market by pitching smaller magazines before pitching big magazines. Do a few short items first to establish credibility. Try online. **Don’t pitch a story idea, write a brilliant essay.**” Panel on *How to Write for Big Name Publications*.
- * **“Write from your true self—get in touch with that self**. You are a river that is ever flowing and craft is the riverbank. Marry craft to self.” Author and #1 Bestselling Writing Coach [James Scott Bell](#), Opening Keynote Speaker
- * **“Readers need to bond with and care about the protagonist in the first paragraph**; set up the protagonist’s character traits within the first five pages.” Literary Agent /Author [Donald Maass](#), *Creating the Greatest Characters of Your Career*
- * **“In revision, ask: what is the story? the theme? do the scenes tie in with the theme and move the plot along?** What needs more work? Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” Editor, [Cheryl Klein](#)
- * “Generate your own work by listening to your own voice- only 2% comes from authentic self; count words; don’t try to organize at first. **Think Scene, Series (meaningful repetition and variation) and Theme.**” Author/Founder, Book Architecture, [Stuart Horwitz](#), *The First Draft- Revision Demystified*
- * **“Become a servant to your reader**. Your story is waiting to be read. Get it done- no excuses.” Author [Adriana Trigiani](#), Central Keynote Speaker, *Your Writing Life*.
- * “Three things you need to write a successful memoir: Strong writing voice; Narrative hook -**Remember SMILE- shocking, memorable, inspiring, loving, entertaining-** and Author platform.” Literary Agent /Author [Regina Brooks](#), Serendipity Literary Agency LLC, *You Should Really Write A Memoir*
- * **“We live in a 140-character world. Your first ten pages have to sing.”** Literary Agent [Paula Munier](#), *The First Ten Pages*.

Questions agents asked during the Pitch Slam where we had two minutes to pitch our story to literary agents and one minute for their response:

How is your story unique in the market?

What is your author platform?

What is your narrative arc?

What is your purpose for telling your story?

Why would I want to read your story?

Who is your audience?

What is your marketing plan?

I left the conference feeling motivated and committed to keep writing as well as uplifted by the efforts of all in the publishing industry to keep moving forward, despite the digital disruptions and unknowns ahead.

How about you? If you've been to a writer's conference, what take-aways do you have to share? Please leave your comments below~

Next week: The Face of Alzheimer's Dementia: A Memoir Moment

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Posted by [Kathy Pooler](#) on Apr 11, 2013 in [Writer's Digest Conference East 2013](#) | [24 comments](#)

24 Comments



1. [Audrey Chin](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Thank you for these takeaways Kathy. They gave me a sniff of what it must be like in publishing capital ... And I hope I'll get there one of these days.

[Respond](#)



o [Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Hi Audrey, It's so nice to see you here! Thanks so much for stopping by and commenting. I hope you do get to a writer's conference soon. They are very enlightening and motivating and I find the networking with other writers to be the best part.

[Respond](#)



2. [Cyd Madsen](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Hi Kathy. Thanks for sharing your experience at the conference. These are gems you've brought back. I'll be re-reading this post several times.

[Respond](#)



o [Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Hi Cyd, I thought of you as I rubbed elbows with the screenwriters! Their sessions were very similar to ours. Al Sharpton's conference was also held at the same time so the place was hopping. Enjoy the "treasures." 😊 I think the best part, beyond the networking with other writers, was the cooperative tone between traditional and self-publishing factions. The focus was on writing and sharing your work by whatever mechanism suits your story and genre. Amen!

[Respond](#)



3. [Susan G. Weidener](#)

Apr 11, 2013

Thank you, Kathy, for sharing so generously all you learned at this conference. So much here . . .so much is happening to make this one of the most dynamic and exciting times for authors. I would add: Believe in your story, believe in yourself. There is an alchemy, a magic to writing in its path to self-discovery, as well as making connections with your readers. As the author of two memoirs, I believe in getting your story out there as soon as it is ready, not waiting. It takes time to build momentum for a book, but in this age of digital publishing, as well as author entrepreneurship, a book no longer has a shelf life. As a self-publisher, I love the total creative control and autonomy I have with my books, their cover design, my own marketing and promotion initiatives, the “surprise” that waits around every corner that comes with the “gift” of holding your book in your hands.

[Respond](#)



o
[Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Susan, You speak well and credibly of the benefits of self-publishing and the best part is there is room for both traditional and self-publishing options, depending on your genre and story. I love your thoughts about getting your book out there and the creative control and autonomy that allows you to give your story the best possible chance to shine. Of course, it starts with a compelling, well-crafted story as you have shown us through both your memoirs. The message that resonated during the entire conference was : this is the best time to be a writer so commit to craft,keep writing and get your work published- Now. You already have everything you need. Your message fits right in with the tone of this conference. I'm looking forward to hearing you at the FREE NAMW Roundtable tonight 7:00 pm EDT. Everyone , check it out at: <http://www.namw.org/2013/04/susan-weidener-guest-blog-post-for-memoir-roundtable-april-11/>

Thanks so much for your comments, Susan. I am inspired!

[Respond](#)



4.
[Barbara Techel](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Thank you, Kathy for sharing a snippet of the inside scoop. I like the positive vibe to what is transpiring as the two worlds of publishing try to work together so it is a win-win for all. Good stuff!

[Respond](#)



o
[Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Thanks, Barbara. It was an uplifting experience.

[Respond](#)



5.
[Linda Austin](#)
Apr 11, 2013

Wow, that's a lot of takeaway. Worth sharing, so I am. Bet that conference wore you out!

[Respond](#)



o
[Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 11, 2013

You're right on that one, Linda. The conference was energizing while it was going on..like a runner's high. It wasn't until I returned home that I felt worn out! Glad you enjoyed the recap.

[Respond](#)



6.
[Terre Britton](#)
Apr 12, 2013

Pithy piece, Kathy, “Questions agents asked during the Pitch Slam” is gold! But I don't understand (Generate your own work by listening to your own voice)- “only 2% comes from authentic self; count words”. Thanks for sharing these nuggets packed with such insight. So nice to hear you came away from it so motivated!

[Respond](#)



o

[Kathy Pooler](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Thanks, Terre. I'm glad you enjoyed the post. As far as your question about voice via Stuart Horwitz, he was emphasizing the importance of writing until you find your "authentic voice" which usually requires a lot of writing and rewriting. Hope that helps!

[Respond](#)

7.

Marlena Baraf

Apr 12, 2013

Thank you Kathy for your insightful take-aways. I almost got myself to the conference but decided to postpone until my revised manuscript is complete. Would love to have met you and other writers in person. The last agent question you list is daunting: What is your marketing plan? My goodness.

[Respond](#)

o

[Kathy Pooler](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Hi Marlana, Thanks for your comments. I would have loved meeting you in person at the conference! It sounds like you are committed to staying focused on completing your manuscript and I commend you for that. I hope you are able to get to a writer's conference in the future.

[Respond](#)

8.

[Belinda Nicoll](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Kathy, as everyone so rightly says, thanks for sharing your knowledge so generously. I'm yet to read all the linked articles, which I definitely will, but I just want to say that whereas the two main take-aways speak of a new industry attitude, the same old Pitch Slam questions indicate that this is still a one-sided contract. I do, of course, understand it in the context of the writer having two minutes to hook a literary agent, but I wonder how many writers – in this changing environment – will remember to ask likeminded questions of their agent during the 'contract' phase.

[Respond](#)

o

[Kathy Pooler](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Thanks, Belinda. You bring up an excellent point which fits in with the message that authors need to be entrepreneurs in their approach to writing and marketing their work. Since the role of agents is changing, they are beginning to ask: what services can I provide the authors? And I agree with you, we all need to play an active role in not selling ourselves short in the contract phase. I love Hugh Howey's (of *Wool* fame) philosophy "my readers market my books." Now that we have direct connections to our readers, we can be in charge of our course of action. I appreciate your thought-provoking question.

[Respond](#)

9.

[Barbara McDowell Whitt](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Kathleen, your comment, "I usually find I get out what I put in and what I found in New York City at this year's Writer's Digest Conference was magical," took me back to the times when I attended International Reading Association conventions where I represented my employer, the Allyn & Bacon, Inc., textbook publishing company. I went to annual conventions in Boston, Detroit and Kansas City. As an employee of the Kansas City Missouri Public Schools I attended conventions in New York City and Toronto.

Because I had attended four conventions I knew my time in Toronto would be magical when I was at the bank and saw a brochure with IRA and four golden eggs in a nest. That thought was clinched when the man who checked my traveling companion and me in at the airport was the husband of a woman with the school district. I had put her in touch with an employee of Harcourt Brace (in the days before Jovanovich) regarding her learning kit which resulted in a publishing contract. When the convention was over, my traveling companion/roommate told me, "You know people. I didn't know that about you, but you know people." We had attended a pre-convention seminar together and then split up for the remaining sessions.

[Respond](#)

o

[Kathy Pooler](#)

Apr 12, 2013

Dear Barbara, Thanks for stopping by and sharing your story. I'm glad to hear the post resonated with your experiences. Conferences are certainly conducive to making meaningful connections as you have shown through your story. Best wishes to you.

[Respond](#)

10. [Debbie](#)
Apr 13, 2013

Kathy, you're a gem for sharing your nuggets from the WD Writing Conference with those of us who couldn't be there — maybe next year, huh??

I love how generous you are with your readers, how hard you've worked to make each one feel a part of your community!

Isn't it exciting to think that somewhere, someone is just waiting to read the story we're writing?!!

[Respond](#)

o [Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 13, 2013

Awww, thanks Debbie. I'm happy to share my conference take-aways and glad you enjoyed them. Yes, I agree, the thought of someone waiting to hear my story is exciting. That is what keeps us all going! Happy writing and thanks for stopping by.

[Respond](#)

11. [Sherrey Meyer](#)
Apr 13, 2013

Kathy, thanks for your generous sharing of takeaways and tips from WD this year. I read Porter's post about traditional and self-publishing and the interesting things he observed. I found it very satisfying that the general consensus seems to be that the two will be able to co-exist. Perhaps that's because of my publishing family history. 😊

[Respond](#)

o [Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 13, 2013

You're welcome, Sherrey! I agree, Porter's assessment was satisfying for all of us. The main message—authors (and readers) matter and this is our time—is refreshing and encouraging. Thanks again for stopping by. 😊

[Respond](#)

12. [Pat](#)
Apr 13, 2013

Thanks for making it possible for me to attend the WD conference from Switzerland. Your generous nuggets of advice from the experts makes me feel almost like I was right there.

[Respond](#)

o [Kathy Pooler](#)
Apr 13, 2013

I wish you could have been with us in person, Pat. You were with us in spirit as we celebrated the launch of *Home Sweet Hardwood* 😊 I'm glad you enjoyed the recap.

[Respond](#)

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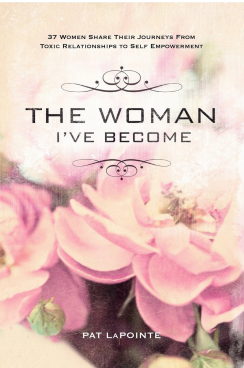
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The Woman I’ve Become



Kathy Pooler



I am a writer and a retired family nurse practitioner working on a memoir about the power of hope through my faith in God. Hope Matters. I believe we are all enriched when we share our stories.

"Some things have to be believed to be seen." Ralph Hodgson

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I like to think of my blog as a kitchen table and the posts as invitations to join in the conversation!

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