

# A Day in the Life – If I Knew Then

By Tami Brothers

I have a tendency to second guess everything I do in life and I find myself doing this more so with my writing career. I'm terrified that I might be banging my head against a brick wall that I later find out wasn't even standing in my path. But until I've climbed over it or walked around it, I don't know if that wall is truly an obstacle or not; and the time I spent contemplating it a waste of time or just another rung on the ladder of success.

In an attempt to build a bridge over a few of these walls for myself and my fellow unpublished GRW members, I decided to tap into the resources available to me. Who better to ask than our fellow members who have recently traveled the unpublished writer's path?

With this in mind, I shot off an e-mail to four writers who had recently made their first sale or have their first few books on the shelves. All four were more than happy to answer my questions and I'm thrilled to share their answers with you below.

*Question #1 – As a newly published author, what do you feel is the most valuable resource book in your library?*

**Debby Giusti** - My Websters and The Synonym Finder, by J I Rodale.

**Devon Gray** - Honestly, the dictionary is my most valuable resource. I keep it next to me when I write, and refer to it often when a particular word eludes me. What was incredibly useful to me was taking courses from Gotham Writers' Workshop. Leigh Michaels (she has had over seventy romance novels published) is the instructor, and the skills I learned through her classes are invaluable.

**Ana Aragon** - I don't use resource books when I'm writing. I've read tons and tons of books on the writing life, craft and how-to books, etc. At some point, you need to put down the books and just write. I use online resources like Chicago Manual of Style, onelook.com, freetranslation.com for translating words into another language, and different online thesaurusreference.com if necessary. I do all my research online, usually as I go.

**Missy Tippens** - For me, it's been Alicia Rasley's "The Story Within Guidebook." I love working through it before I write each book!

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*Question #2 - Do you currently have a website? If so, what are your thoughts on creating it before you were actually published.*

**Debby** - Every writer should develop an Internet presence before they get published. As we all know, a website is the most economical and effective way to advertise on a large scale. So reserve your domain name now. I picked up <http://www.debbygiusti.com/> a number of years ago. I also reserved the most common misspelling of my name so when folks incorrectly enter my URL, they still get to my site.

Unique names don't usually pose a problem, but if you're Susie Smith or Mary Jones, the domain name you want may not be available. So come up with an alternative—SusieSmith.net or SusieSmithWritesRomance.com or AuthorMaryJones.com—then lock your site in place.

Another question that often comes up is about blogging. A daily blog can pull us away from our primary job of writing the next book. Even posting three times a week, which most experts say is the minimum new information needs to be uploaded in order to ensure return visitors, can be daunting. So join a group blog. I post weekly on <http://www.craftieladiesofsuspense.blogspot.com/> and once a month on this site, <http://www.seekerville.blogspot.com/>.

Blogging allows me to “meet” new writers just starting on their publishing journey as well as seasoned authors whose expertise sheds light on areas where I may need help. The regular blogging commitment encourages me to write articles on craft that I'll archive on a new website I'm currently having designed so when someone wants to know about “Savvy Submissions” or “How To Get Your Name In Print Before Your Book Sells,” they can head to <http://www.debbygiusti.com/> for the information.

Note: If you don't have your own blogspot, visit a few sites regularly and post comments often. So many of those who stop by Seekerville are now dear friends. We're thrilled when they final in contests, win awards or make that first sale!

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**Devon** - I do have a website, and just recently had it updated by a very talented graphic designer, Rae Monet. In my personal experience, my website was instrumental in my networking efforts.

As a pre-published author, building a foundation of other aspiring authors and published authors makes the road a little less bumpy when you do get that first book contract. You have a group of people invested in your journey, and many are very selfless with their time and skills to help you navigate the rapidly changing waters.

Of course, you have to work your website as a pre-published author. Start a blog, hop on MySpace. Become an active participant in other author's sites. When your time comes and you get that email or call you've been waiting on, you'll appreciate the network you've established.

**Ana** - Yes, I have a website and it's important to have a presence on the web. Unfortunately, daily blogs and contests, etc. can be tremendous time-wasters. I had my domain name reserved before I was published and once I had my contract in hand, I activated it and built my website.

**Missy** - I do have one, [www.missytippens.com](http://www.missytippens.com). However, I reserved my domain name years ago. I suggest you do that, even if you're not ready to put the time into a website yet. Once I did start my website, while still unpublished, I included a bio and information on my contest finals and wins. It was a very basic one-pager. Then when I sold to BelleBooks, I was able to add that info quickly. Later, when I sold to Steeple Hill, I added more pages to my site.

As a friend of mine, Camy Tang, said, "Your website is your online calling card."

*Question #3 - Do you have any thoughts about entering writing contests before you were published? Do you think they helped you any on your journey to publication?*

**Debby** - YES!!! Before I sold, three of my manuscripts had finalized almost simultaneously in three different contests and were judged by three editors at Steeple Hill, the publisher I was targeting, including the Senior Editor and the Executive Editor. I won the contests and received a request from each of the editors. Not long after that, I got The Call!

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**Devon** - I have only entered the Maggie. From what I've heard from others who have is that is kind of a hit or miss experience. If there is a particular editor who is judging the contest, and your only shot of getting your work in front of her/him is to enter a contest, then I think it is probably worth it. It is also a way of getting feedback on your writing from multiple sources.

I know if I were to enter anything, I would do a lot of research prior to mailing my manuscript off to see who will be doling out advice on my writing. I also think it is important to keep in mind that you have to stay true to your own creativity. It is very easy to get confused by contradicting opinions of your work. You need to let your voice come through. Too many times I tried to change my writing to "fit" the opinion of someone else. It is never true.

**Ana** - Writing contests can be extremely important at the very beginning and I did enter the Maggies and a couple of others. The critique I got from the published authors was consistent in terms of the writing; however, I got mixed messages on the actual sub-genre I had entered.

**Missy** - I entered contests like crazy! In fact, it got to be a sort of addiction. :) But for good cause. I learned a whole lot from the feedback, plus once I started finaling, it put my work in front of editors.

I suggest you choose contests wisely. I always selected the ones which had final editor judges that I wanted to target. It can be expensive, though, so be sure to plan ahead for how many you think you can afford during the year.

Yes, I do think contests helped me on my journey toward publication. My manuscript for "Her Unlikely Family" was requested through a contest.

*Question #4 - What do you think of critique groups?*

**Debby** - Writing is a lonely business. We need support, which is one of the best parts of being in a critique group. We also need fresh eyes to look at our work and the insights that other people can offer. Ensure you're true to your own voice, but having people you trust-- meaning they want the best for you and your work--review your writing can only help!

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**Devon** - I have one critique partner whose opinion I trust. She has been a big part of my journey to publication. It is important to find the perfect fit, and I believe finding someone who writes within the romance genre but not in the same sub-genre is ideal. They understand the basics of writing romance, but the chance of them inserting their voice into your writing is not as likely. I write erotic romance, and my cp writes Victorian historical. I also have two people who read what I write. One of them is also a writer, the other is an avid reader. I take their opinions into account as well.

**Ana** - Critique groups are a wonderful way of getting your writing in front of a live person. But you have to be careful in the way you critique another person's work. I've been in face-to-face critique groups and online critique groups.

**Missy** - I think they're great if you lay down the framework for how you want to work together. Have everyone tell their expectations right up front, then re-evaluate on occasion. Our group met weekly in person in the beginning, but now we work online on an as needed basis.

*Question #5 - Can you share any of those "If I had known then what I know now, I would have done XXX differently."*

**Debby** - I would have written my bio, created a logline/tagline (Mine's *Faith with an edge . . . cross my heart!*), and come up with a logo early on. The more you can have in place before you sell, the better!

**Devon** - The biggest rookie mistake I made was to hire a freelance editor after I completed my first manuscript. You have to pay by the page upfront, and when you have written a 92k word manuscript, it isn't cheap! I thought I had researched her well, her credentials seemed top-notch. The one question I neglected to ask? "What types of books do you like to read for pleasure?"

As it turns out, she hates the romance genre. Of course, she wouldn't dare tell me that, because then she would be out the big paycheck. She basically told me I couldn't write, and that I should consider taking classes. Lots of classes. I can't tell you how hard it is to not call her up and tell her that despite my experience with her, I still managed to get a book contract within the year.

What did I learn from this (besides the obvious financial blunder)? You have to have a thick skin. And if you want to be a writer, never quit until you get that contract. It may take a while, but publication goes to the last ones standing.

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**Ana** - First of all, I would have spent more time working on building a "presence" on the web. My book came out first as an e-book then in print one month later. If I'd have had a stronger presence on the web, my book would have gotten more e-reviews, which would have meant stronger sales at the beginning. What I've learned is that promoting yourself/your book is much harder than actually writing the book!

**Missy** - I would have moved on from writing and re-writing the same books over and over and would have written a stash of books I could have produced for my editor once she bought my first. Instead, I didn't have but one book ready to go next (which doesn't fit the line), and now I'm finding books one and two will be 16 months apart. Not ideal. So keep moving and writing new stories. You'll get better and better as you go anyway!

Thanks a ton, ladies, for all your wonderful answers. I have to be honest when I say that it took me a number of years before I felt comfortable enough to ask some of these questions. It is through the friendships I've made with my local writing chapter that I've been able to venture down this road.

The best advice I can give to you all is to learn from those who have more experience than we do and hopefully when we are in the same position, we can "pay it back" as they have. Show your thanks to these wonderful ladies by going out and buying their books. I'm sure they will appreciate any support you can give them.

Best of luck to you all and happy writing!

Information on my wonderful guests!!!

### **Debby Giusti**

My debut: *NOWHERE TO HIDE*, April 2007

My second: *SCARED TO DEATH*, August 2007

My third book: *MIA: MISSING IN ATLANTA*, was a March 2008 release from Steeple Hill Love Inspired Suspense

My fourth book: *COUNTDOWN TO DEATH*, is scheduled for October 2008

And my fifth book: *PROTECTING HER CHILD*, will be out in May 2008

[www.DebbyGiusti.com](http://www.DebbyGiusti.com)

[www.Seekerville.blogspot.com](http://www.Seekerville.blogspot.com)

[www.CraftieLadiesofSuspense.blogspot.com](http://www.CraftieLadiesofSuspense.blogspot.com)

# **A Day in the Life – If I Knew Then (page 7)**

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## **Devon Gray**

*Addicted* coming in September 2008 from The Wild Rose Press

*The Divorcee Whisperer* is under consideration for publication by The Wild Rose Press

I have also been invited to participate in an anthology with three other authors that will be under consideration with The Wild Rose Press

[www.authordevongray.com](http://www.authordevongray.com)

[www.myspace.com/authordevongray](http://www.myspace.com/authordevongray)

## **Ana Aragón**

*Sidelined by Love* (The Wild Rose Press) December 2007

*Strike Three--You're Mine* (The Wild Rose Press) October/November 2008

*Auld Lang Syne* (TWRP Anthology) November/December 2008 [www.anaaragon.com](http://www.anaaragon.com)

## **Missy Tippens**

*Her Unlikely Family*, Steeple Hill Love Inspired Feb. 2008

*His Forever Love*, Steeple Hill Love Inspired June 2009

[www.missytippens.com](http://www.missytippens.com)