

## ***The Brave New World of Indie Publishing***

### *Indie Publishing 101 – To Be or Not To Be (1 Hour Class – Class Outline)*

#### **Intro – A Brief History Lesson**

- First – A little of my Publishing History/Journey
  - I came on the scene in 2008, when I received my first publishing contract from a major Christian publisher, in what is now called “traditional publishing.”
  - Back then, it was just called “publishing.” There really were no other realistic or worthwhile alternatives.
  - Every writer who hoped to see their books on the shelves or in readers hands had **only 1 of 2 options**:
    1. Somehow become one of the select few able to get an A-list literary agent to take you on, who then helped you land a contract with a mainstream Christian publisher.
    2. Keep trying.
  - The term “indie publishing” was unheard of, and self-publishing was looked down upon (to put it gently).
    - Really, it was condemned. You only did it if you’re writing wasn’t good enough for publication.
    - And you were so desperate to have your name on a book, you’d pay thousands of dollars to a “vanity press” in exchange for a garage full of books you couldn’t sell.
    - Most serious-minded writers completely rejected the idea of self-publishing and just kept trying to improve their writing until a publishing house finally accepted them.
    - For some, it took years. For others, it never happened.
  - I was very fortunate.

- I finished my first novel in 2008 and signed with an A-list literary agent almost immediately.
- She got a contract with Revell (Baker Publishing Group) in less than 2 months.
- That book, *The Unfinished Gift*, did very well. It went on to win 2 Carol awards and has sold over 70,000 copies.
- It's still in print and has made the Amazon bestseller list every Christmas since 2009.
- After 2 more novels, I started writing fulltime in 2010. In 2015, the last 2 of my books with Revell came out.
- I've written 12 novels for them (avg 2/year) and 1 for Guideposts.
- Up until the end of 2014, I thought my writing career was all set and would go on like this forever.
- But around 2011-12 the publishing world began to undergo a revolutionary change.
  - Not unlike the time when horse and buggies gave way to the automobile.
  - Or when the typewriter gave way to the personal computer.
- What Has Changed –
  - Essentially, the Readers have (the Place where they buy their books).
    - 70% of Americans haven't been in a bookstore the last 5 years.
  - To give you an idea of how much has changed...when my first book came out in 2009, I didn't know anyone who owned a Kindle.
    - There was only one version of Kindle, and it cost \$300.
    - My e-book sales were less than 3% that year.
    - Most people were afraid to use their credit cards to buy things online.
  - Now more than half of Americans own a Kindle or some other E-reading device.

- And more than half the books purchased now are being bought online.
- A growing majority of those purchases are now e-books.
- And this trend is still growing.
- Major bookstore chains have gone belly up, or drastically reduced their number of stores nationwide. 2 SLIDES
- This massive shift in readers' buying habits is relatively short period of time, I think, is the primary catalyst for this surge and wide acceptance of indie publishing.
  - Indie Publishing has grown exponentially in the last 5 years.
  - In 2014, I taught at several writers' conferences mainly on topics related to how to write well enough to get traditionally published.
  - There were NO Topics on Indie Publishing then. NOW, they're all over the place.
- The reason is...
  - The primary source of revenue for Traditional publishing, and for the advances they've been able to pay published authors, comes directly from book orders from these traditional stores.
  - When people stopped buying their books from retail stores, the money stopped flowing into the publisher's pockets. Without that money, they can't stay afloat.
  - And they certainly can't pay their authors decent advances for writing books, so the money stopped flowing to the authors' pockets as well.
  - Many have not been re-signed or signed contracts for significantly less money.
- A lot of successful writers started to look into indie publishing.
  - Some because they had no choice if they wanted to keep writing.
  - Others (like me) figured out something..."Why should I keep giving away 80% of my book's sale price to get my books on bookstore shelves if people aren't shopping there anymore?"

- Amazon is willing to give me 70% of each copy sold (I can get the books into readers' hands on my own).
- In 2015, my first Full-on Indie Year:
  - I published 2 novels and a 31-day Devotional book (pass them around).
  - They did well enough to keep writing fulltime.
- In 2016-17, I've released 4 more novels (Now have 3 Books in each series)
  - My Indie books have done very well.
  - The past 2 years, my Book income exceeded my BEST years with my traditional publisher.
- I'm NOT ALONE – Indie Authors are doing better (on the whole) than Traditional authors (SEE GRAPH).

### **NOT Saying Indie is the ONLY WAY TO GO**

- Having shared all this, I should mention a few words of caution...
  - Traditional publishing is NOT DEAD. It may still survive (although in a much different fashion).
  - Those who do survive, however, are going to have to make radical changes in order to adapt and compete in this new online market.
- Also – There are OTHER OPTIONS in the indie publishing world besides doing everything yourself.
  - Many don't have the entrepreneurial skills to take on all these non-writing, publishing tasks themselves.
    - Maybe you just want to write and not have all of these distractions as part of the equation.
    - You can GIVE UP some of the 70% you could be making on your own to have qualified people handle these things for you.
    - If that's you, consider signing with a SMALL INDEPENDENT PRESS.
    - We'll talk MORE ABOUT these things A LITTLE LATER.

- In my final word of caution is this: Do not view indie publishing as a shortcut to writing success.
  - There are no shortcuts.
  - In the end, if you don't put out a great book (great story, written well, that looks professionally done), you won't succeed.
  - Which basically means, besides my class on indie publishing, you really do need to take all those other classes that will teach you how to write fiction well.
  - The indie authors I know who are making it are successful because they write well, not because they are indie.

### Defining Our Terms

- Let's take a few moments to make sure we're all singing the same sheet of music.
- Let's define our terms:
  - **Traditional Publishing** - Would have been simply called "publishing" up until a few years ago.
    - As I said, used to be no other legitimate alternative.
    - A writer writes a book and gets it ready for publishing, then tries to secure a literary agent.
    - A good agent then "shops the manuscript" to mainstream publishers known to publish your kind of book.
    - Hopefully, they secure a publishing contract and the publisher agrees to pay you an "**advance**." A royalty arrangement is also hammered out.
    - **Royalties** represent the percentage of money you earn each time a copy of your book sells.
    - An Advance, you could say, is the least amount of money you will be paid for that book.

- Once the book is released, it starts to earn royalties, but you aren't paid another dime from the publisher until your book "**earns out**" its advance.
- Your royalties are accumulating until your advance is reached. You don't receive this money because you already have...*in Advance*.
- Statistically (and sadly) the large majority of traditionally published books don't earn out their advance.
- If they do, or get even close, usually the publisher continues to give you new contracts.
- If they don't, the publisher eventually drops you like a rock.
- Another Term Sometimes used on the Internet – "**Trad Pubbed**"
  - Simply an abbreviation for traditionally published.
- **Indie Author** or **Indie Published** –
  - "Indie" of course means independent or independently.
  - Usually when someone is an indie author or is indie published, what we are really saying is that either by choice, or because they had no other choice, they are publishing their books outside the realm of traditional publishing.
- What is the **difference** between being "**indie published**" and being **self-published**?
  - There may be none. The terms are often used interchangeably.
  - I believe the term "indie" arose because of the negative connotation formerly associated with the idea of being self-published.
- Used to be Self-Pubbed = Desperate Writer
  - Back in the day when being trad-pubbed was your only alternative, people who chose self-publishing were regarded as desperate and subpar.
  - Recall the garage full of books image.

- With the sweeping changes that have taken place, and the rise of high-quality indie authors, the idea of being self-published is not looked down upon as much.
- But I think people still prefer the term indie published, rather than referring to themselves as self-published.
- So...being indie published usually means the author writes the book then takes off their “writing hat” and begins to wear all the other hats normally worn by staff in a traditional publishing house.
  - They become responsible for having their work properly edited.
  - Getting a quality cover created.
  - Having the book properly formatted.
  - Uploading the book to all the online stores or having print copies made.
  - Then, of course, the result of marketing involved.
- BUT... being indie published can ALSO MEAN you signed a contract with a SMALL, INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING HOUSE.
  - Some indie authors either can't, or don't want to, wear all these hats.
  - Fortunately, many small independent publishing firms have arisen offering indie authors a “turn key solution” to their publishing dilemma.
  - They usually don't offer an advance, but will do most of the legwork for you in exchange for an agreed-upon percentage of your book sales.
  - They, in effect, become your indie publisher.
- Some of you may want to consider this option.
- Final Term – **Hybrid Author** –

- As the name suggests, this is an author who does both. They write under contract with a traditional publisher, but also publish books as an indie.
- A few years ago, this term didn't exist, because trad pubs wouldn't allow their authors to do this.
- What really opened the door for hybrid authors to exist was the changing market.
  - Traditional publishers were forced to allow their authors to do this.
  - It was either that, or lose them all together.
  - And some began to recognize, if anything, these indie books actually helped their other books to sell.
- What are some reasons an author might want to “go hybrid?”
  - They want to publish books in a different genre than the books they've been contracted to write. Typically publishers don't want you to write in more than one.
  - They want to publish a book they believe in, but one their publisher rejected.
- Both of these reasons are true of my story. My Story - Compare 2 of my Books (with When Night Comes).
  - Another reason could be the publisher is only offering a contract for 1 book a year (maybe the author can write 2 or 3).
- Hopefully, all the things I've shared this past hour will help CLEAR UP THE FOG about Indie Publishing.