

I Know Why I'm Not a Bestselling Author

Last year, I decided to publish my first novel. I woke up on a random day, with an idea for a layered romantic suspense, and I jumped right in. "*Fool's End*" was originally thought of as a tv series, but I had no clue how to actually bring my story to life, without the necessary resources. So, I decided I'd turn it into a book, knowing I could self-publish, and I just *knew* my story would top the *NY Times* Bestseller list! I didn't have a single doubt in my mind, that I was about to write the greatest story of all time. My confidence was very much my guiding light—which is very rare, for a woman who doesn't typically go for things that aren't a guaranteed success. I usually need to know that the work will pay off, before I dive in, but I was *really* excited about this story that felt... *fresh*.

So, I began writing.

Draft one was complete in just a few short days, and I told myself, "*this is the best story, ever!*" I visited Madame Google, to find any formatting guides that were done *without* Ai, (because I could never imagine calling myself a creative, while cheating), so I could figure out exactly what I wanted my book to look like. I hadn't realized there were so many ways to personalize the way a book is published! I made sure my page layout was pleasing to my eye, chose the font, decided on how to create my headers, and learned how to properly number my pages (*that last one took me to the gates of purgatory, because I couldn't figure out how to keep each section numbered properly, to save my life*). Once I got the formatting all squared away, I thought I was done! Then, I realized my *novel* was now only *novella* length, at 177 pages! I was devastated! I thought I lost a few chapters, in the formatting process, and I shed *real* tears. Turns out, formatting a 480-page book, to fit into

the parameters you choose, alters the page numbers, because of the way the words are spread about the page. *Who knew?* Because it definitely was *not* me.

So, I got back to writing.

I added six more chapters to my book. I like varying chapter lengths, so the page numbers grew rather quickly, and I obsessed even further, because a few of the newer chapters were added into earlier ones, giving them additional detail. The romance portion of the story is a second chance, and the suspense element is in the form of a *whodunnit*, which allowed me to play on both the character's past emotions and her present-day anxieties. I am such a sucker for added depth in fictional stories, so the flashbacks were my favorite, and making some of them longer, gave me added joy. While reading through everything, I caught myself saying, "*what do you mean?*" with the biggest smile, while rubbing my feet together, because it was all so perfect! Honestly, the writing process was quick and easy for me, because this story is just so good! (I say "*is,*" and not "*was,*" because I am still absolutely enamored with the way I told this story).

Then, it was time to get into the editing.

I'm a little old school, and even if I'm doing my drafting on the computer, I *must* do my edits on paper—*like a civilized person*—and I use red ink pens, marking up the pages, like a madwoman! It's the most satisfying part of my editing process. All the ink blotches, and the messy scribbles, really show that I'm making much needed improvements. I edited on paper, then updated my manuscript, then printed and edited again, just to be safe. I even went through three rounds of reading aloud, and editing for flow, after that, before beginning my audiobook recording.

The audiobook is the *actual* evil villain of this story; to make things perfectly clear.

I was already intimidated with the idea of recording my audiobook, because I have a lot of issues with my voice, in general. My vocal weakness has a lot to do with illness, and in that, I also lack breath control. In my inability to fully express myself vocally, I knew the challenge of recording would be a steep mountain to climb, but I still wasn't expecting it to be as terrible as it was. My biggest issue was the fact that I learned I am *much* more sensitive to sound, than I previously knew. Misophonia isn't even a good enough explanation for what it is that I experienced, during this process. It took me approximately 67 days to record my book; because it wouldn't have been my life, if every disgusting noise known to man weren't coming out of my mouth. I cried—a lot. In the midst of my recording, my computer malfunctioned, and I accidentally *permanently* deleted nineteen entire chapters. I had to do a full reset of my system, but I wasn't aware I hadn't backed up my audio, to my hard drive, before continuing to wipe everything clean. I cried for two days, while trying to soothe my voice. My throat felt so raw, and a lingering migraine was trying to *end* me. *The next round was even worse.* I seemed to make even more sounds, and the scratches in my voice became almost unbearably painful.

I did a lot of complaining on social media, and with a few friends and family members, because complaining felt necessary for my sanity. Many people have asked me why I put myself through the recording process, when so many other authors don't even bother. My answer is always the same: *"accessibility is too important to me, to not have my creations available to those who need different formats."* I mentioned that illness is the reason for my weak vocals. Well, my specific illness rendered me disabled, a few years ago. Though, prior to disability, I was already conscious of differently abled persons, and I understood the need for multiple mediums of media consumption, so I always planned to

have all formats available, if I ever published. But it was in “reader spaces,” that I learned many authors don’t provide audiobooks—ultimately limiting their reach. So many people without limitations also prefer audio, so it was a no-brainer, for me to make sure my stories can be available to anyone interested. After all, I thought I was going to be the next *hot-shot* author out! Could I have hired someone to narrate my books? *Absolutely!* But I wanted to do this entire process myself, *for* myself. Without making this about me being *ill*, I will quickly highlight the importance of doing things on my own:

I was told I wouldn’t be alive, this long. I was told speaking would be impossible, after a while. I was in the middle of creating my obituary, when I realized I still had so many things I still wanted to do! I wanted to prove to myself that my “*anything is possible*” mindset wasn’t for naught. I didn’t want anyone coming in, and telling me what to change, or making suggestions, that cause me to second guess myself. I wrote important and relatable subject matter into this story, that closely aligns with my own lived experience. I wanted to be the only voice attached to something so important to me, because *I* don’t often feel represented, in this world. I wanted to do this, *for* me—*my way*.

It was *so hard* to do, but I wouldn’t change it.

In the same breath, still, to say it was *hell* would be an understatement.

It was now less than two weeks before I had to have everything turned in, in order for my book to release on the day I scheduled, and without penalty. I had a concert to attend, back home in Atlanta; with eight days to get the audio complete, do all of the audio edits, and then read through the book *with* the audio, to make sure my manuscript matched my spoken words. I pushed myself to the brink of mania, but I finished recording the final chapter, the hour before my flight. I worked on audio edits at the airport, in the car, while

my sister's dog tried to eat my arm (for play—he's a giant husky, and he thinks I'm his chew toy, every time I'm home. He's gentle, but it can be annoying to have an arm in a pup's mouth, until he's over not being properly stimulated). Through the editing process, every single second of listening to the sound of my own voice, was *agony*, but I got it done!

I was immensely proud of myself, because I submitted all formats, *on time*!

And then...

The worst thing happened.

On publishing day, I was so excited! Due to travel, and my extreme last-minuteness, I hadn't seen the final version of my book! I was finally going to peek inside of the version of my story that was out in the wild! I opened the book to a random page, and immediately saw the *ugliest* typo of my life! The word was, "*money*," and my book said, "*koneey*." How Microsoft Word allowed me to get away with that, I will never know, but it sent me *reeling*! I immediately swiped through a few more chapters, and there, printed clear as day, were so many hideous typos, made-up words, and incorrectly placed quotation marks. I had rushed through matching my manuscript to my audio, because I needed to turn it in, and I obviously went too fast to pay attention to the *many* red squiggles my computer *had* to have given me!

I *knew* I should've prioritized a final proofread. I *knew* I needed to go through my manuscript at least one more time, but I also *didn't have time*. I knew then, I'd look like an illiterate fool, to anyone who purchased. I was actually grateful for my lack of support, that day, because I was able to update the manuscript, before this mistake could become widespread, and I tracked down my first orders, to replace their copies.

...All but one.

My friends and family weren't the most supportive of this journey. My siblings and my nana were the only people who had purchased my book, on release day. Well, that's what I *thought*, at least. There was some anonymous person, who decided to support me, and as kind as that was, I literally freaked out, *begging* them to show themselves! I wanted to replace their book, because it wasn't up to par with my standards as a writer! I couldn't let them just think I was *dumb*!

Even after my social media begging—*for more than a year, now*—they've still not come forward. They're probably thinking, "*I'll use this against her, forever*," (insert a maniacal laugh, here).

Yes, I'm a little dramatic.

I'm sure a typo or two still slipped through the cracks, because I'm human. The reality of human error is the only reason I'm not in a full-on panic, each morning. I'd rather people see a typo, than accuse me of using Ai, for *any* reason. I know I'm allowed to make a mistake, so I can't be devastated every time I do. I just didn't want a million ridiculous ones, in one novel, because that's not how I wish to exist in the world, knowing I'm much more educated than my original release would have exhibited.

A little "*oopsie*," here and there, is fine...

Perfectly fine.

But... I just *know* that *one* person, who has that first version, was connected to the powers that be, and somehow, *they* are the *sole* reason why I'm not a bestseller.