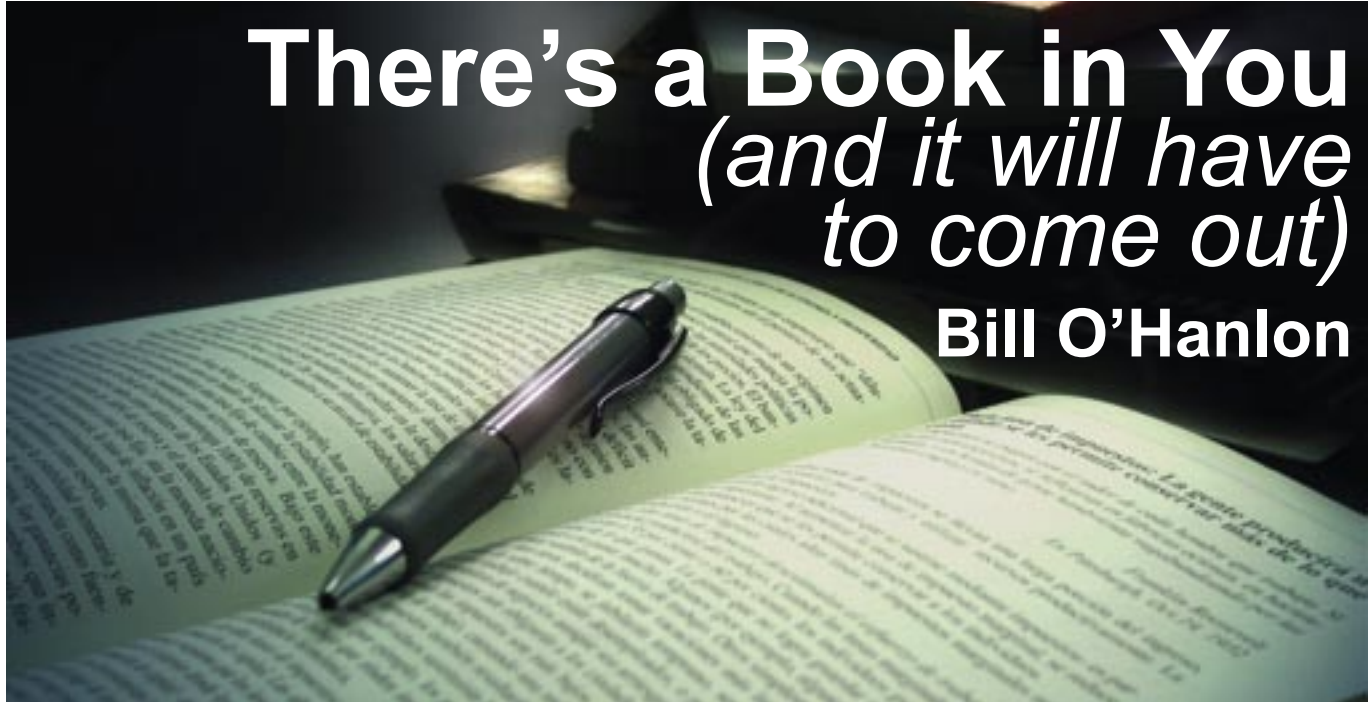


There's a Book in You (and it will have to come out)

Bill O'Hanlon



“I think I’d like to write a book”.....

You don’t know how many times I have heard that in my 25+ years of teaching workshops. Want to guess how many of those people actually wrote their books? A very small percentage, I can assure you.

Why is there such a slip between cup and lip when it comes to writing the book you know you have in you and that would really contribute to the world?

A few years ago, I began coaching people about how to write, how to write well, how to organize and focus their book projects, and how to successfully navigate the confusing and sometimes frustrating world of publishing. I have just completed my 23rd book and having been published by large mainstream publishers (Penguin; HarperCollins; W.W. Norton; Rodale), smaller professional publishers (Guilford; Brunner/Mazel), as well as having self-published both in print and over the internet. I have learned through hard-won experience how to both write books and get them published.

Here is a list of typical reasons people give me about why they haven’t written their books (yet, I often add):

I don’t have enough time

Why should I bother to write it; it will never get published?

I don’t have anything original to say

It’s arrogant to think I could write a book

I can’t put myself out in front of people (this is a popular one in the UK; for some reason, I never seem to hear this one in the U.S.)

I can’t write; I’m no good at it

I’m disorganized; hyperactive; like to talk better than I like to write; and so on

What I write must be perfect and I must know every reference and everything about my subject before I write the book

I’ll never be as good or as smart as [fill in the name of the writer you are comparing yourself to here]

I am sure some of you reading this can fill in your own reason, but suffice it to say they all have one thing in common. They are things you say to yourself or think that don’t help get the book written.

Here is the Zen of writing: The only way to get a book written is to write it. Everything else is commentary and reasons. One successful writer, when asked how he writes so much, gives this simple explanation: *Bum glue! I glue my bum to the chair and write.*

Obviously it is not so easy for many people, even after hearing such enlightening and clear advice. That is why I created a seminar for helping people get their books written and published. After having a mission to transform psychotherapy and feeling it is coming to completion, I thought I might be able to stay home and rest a bit, but I found another passion had seized me: I love to help people figure out what their contributions are and remove the barriers to realizing those contributions. Since I think there are many of you who have books that would really help the world and other people, I am committed to helping you clarify what the book is about, get it written and get it published.

My friends in Whalley, The Northern School of NLP, have organized several workshop for me up in Lancashire in the past and they have asked me to come back to the UK where for the first time, I will be delivering my Book Writing and Publishing Coaching workshop in July 2006. I hope to see you there.

On the next page there are some tips which will help you with those beliefs and ideas that might poison your writing dreams and goals:

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The Poisons That Will Kill Your Writing Dreams and Ambitions (and Some Recommended Antidotes)

1. The Perfection Poison

The conditions must be perfect; My information or knowledge must be complete and perfect; My writing skills must be perfect; I must read another book about writing or go to another writer's course or workshop . . . before I start or do a project.

Antidotes:

- Isabel Allende once taught a class on novel writing and suggested her students try to write the "Worst American Novel." Try to write badly. Do a bad first draft, giving yourself permission for it to be bad and wrong.
- Use a computer instead of writing freehand, It is easier to erase, cut and paste.
- Start writing. Most good writing is rewriting anyway.

2. The "I don't have anything original to say" Poison

It's all been said before. Everyone knows this already. I don't have anything important to say. Nobody will want to read it. Nobody will want to read it. Who the Hell am I to think I have anything to say or that I can write a book?

Antidotes:

- You have a unique slant/way of saying it. Trust that.
- Find your writer's voice.

3. The "I don't have time to write" Poison

I have to make money, raise kids, have responsibilities, am too tired, am too busy, will write someday when things slow down or I go half-time, or slot out one day a week for my writing

Antidotes:

- Bulls---!
- Maya Angelou tells of writing her early books with her children crawling all over her in the kitchen. There are orange juice and vomit stains on some of her early manuscripts.
- Steven King wrote his first novels while working full time as a janitor.
- I wrote my first ten books in ten years with four kids at home with a full time job.

4. The "This will never get published, so why bother to write it" Poison

So many people have unpublished novels in their drawers. The publishing industry is so competitive. I don't know how to get anything published. I tried and was rejected by all the publishers/agents/magazines I tried. I'll fail.

Antidotes:

- Only God knows the future and what will get published. Lest you get confused, remember you are not God.
- Get some coaching and/or more information about how to make it more likely your stuff will be published. Then try again. "Ever try? Ever Fail? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail Better." - Samuel Beckett
- The publishing industry needs product to keep functioning. Publishers are constantly looking for publishable books and the next big thing.

5. The "I'm not in the mood to write/I'm not inspired" Poison

If I sit down to write when I am not inspired or visited by the Muse, the writing won't be good, so why bother?

Antidotes:

- Then do corrections, formatting, outlining, backups of your material or research during this non-inspired time.
- "Sit down and write. It will take care of all those moods you're having." - Ray Bradbury
- "Inspiration comes during work," says author Madeleine L'Engle, "not before it."
- Write anyway to exercise your writing muscle, so that when the Muse deigns to visit, you'll be ready with your writing skills intact and well-developed.

6. The Comparison Poison

have as big a platform, as _____.

Antidotes:

- Go to the bookstores and see how many books are published that aren't that great or that have been written by people you've never heard of.
- Model on them or find your own unique strengths or ways of compensating for your weaknesses.

And we'll give the last word to Somerset Maugham:

"There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.

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Bill O'Hanlon is a psychotherapist who was a developer of Solution-Oriented Therapy and a founder of Possibility and Inclusive Therapies. His clinical work is recognized for its collaborative respectful approach to clients. From his early start as a family therapist and then gardener and student of Milton Erickson, he has become an international trainer, known for his storytelling, irreverent humour, clear and accessible presentation style - and his psychotic enthusiasm for whatever he is doing.

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