

Searching for a Second Career

By Jennifer J. Schafer

According to the Alternative Lawyer Jobs website,¹ there are more than one million lawyers in North America, and at least 40 percent of them wish they were doing something else. And—as we enjoy reading the winning short-story submissions in this issue of the *Bar Journal*—who hasn't dreamed that they might “out-Grisham” John Grisham?² We spend countless hours drafting tediously uninteresting contracts and briefs; why not devote our enviable writing skills to something more interesting—and perhaps with a larger fan base? This article is intended to give you budding Hemingways a little hope. But first...

A Necessary Dose of Reality

A decline in job satisfaction for those in the legal profession—due to billable hour demands, a lack of client appreciation, or sheer boredom—is nothing new, and the current state of the economy only serves to accelerate the decline. What might previously have been an unrealistic fantasy of succeeding as a popular writer seems so much more enticing when your present day job isn't paying the bills. Whether you're a solo practitioner whose paying clients have disappeared or a law-firm associate who has fallen victim to that quaint phrase of “downsizing,” the first order of business should be a realistic assessment of how you can continue to earn a living while pursuing your dream of becoming an author.

In researching an alternative career that actually pays, you could start with as broad a list as “300+ Things You Can Do with a Law Degree,”³ which appears to be a list of almost every job in existence. Rather than overwhelm yourself with options, you might want to start narrowing your field of search by assessing your true interests and abili-

ties. You can obtain a free “temperament report,” combining a career skills assessment with a personality test, through the Keirsey Temperament Sorter.⁴ Are you a rational, a guardian, an idealist, or an artisan? Or, for a more unusual approach to determining your best alternative career, try the Color Career Counselor found at www.careerpath.com.

Once you've narrowed the field to jobs that fit your personality, you might need to brush up on your job-searching skills. Of course, you can always run a general job search on SimplyHired⁵ or post your résumé on Monster,⁶ along with 30 or 40 million other jobseekers, but to actually land a job this year, you'll need to work a little harder. The Riley Guide⁷ is an excellent resource if you intend to focus your job search online. The guide provides information for finding websites with good job listings, organizing your search, researching and targeting potential employers, and customizing your résumé to each job opportunity.⁸ There are also websites geared specifically toward networking and employment opportunities for professionals, such as www.guru.com (freelance opportunities for professionals), www.jobfox.com (job matching site for professionals), and www.linkedin.com (networking for professionals).⁹

Still Determined to Become the Next Scott Turow . . . or Stephen King?

Here are some tips to get you started on your writing career:¹⁰

1. **Consider all the options.** Interested in writing children's books? Check out <http://www.writingforchildren.com/G7304/>. Want to give superhero novels a shot? You'll find everything you need at www.superheronation.com, including such helpful articles as “How to Make Your Story Less ‘Weird’ and More Novel” and “Common Problems with Psychic Heroes.” For any fiction writing—horror, science fiction, romance, or even the legal thriller—www.fictionfactor.com is an indispensable resource. The Online Magazine for Fiction Writers includes informative articles on writing topics such as “Creating Realistic Dialogue” and offers online courses for writing in specific genres.¹¹ Perhaps most useful are the market listings, which allow you to select a writing category (genre) and gain access to detailed listings on submission requirements and pay rates for magazine articles, short stories, and writing contests.

2. **Create a support network.** Writer's block is a real obstacle. Endless hours of concentrating and trying to write can still result in a blank page. First, carry a small notebook with you everywhere; you never know when the next brilliant idea might strike. Second, for inspiration and constructive feedback, join a writer's group. At www.writing-world.com, you can find support on living “The Writing Life” and also get assistance finding an editor and promoting your work.¹² Or join www.writing.com, www.urbis.com, or www.storylink.com, where a free membership offers you an online writing portfolio and an opportunity to communicate with other creative minds like yourself.

3. **Start writing.** Try the “Snowflake Method,” created by author Randy Ingermanson, where “you start small, then build stuff up until it looks like a story.”¹³

(a) Write a one-sentence summary of the entire story. This forces you to distill rambling ideas into a focused story concept.

(b) Write a one-sentence summary of the entire story. This forces you to distill rambling ideas into a focused story concept.

- (b) Expand the one-sentence summary into a paragraph. Lay out the basic plotline, including an opening scene, major conflicts, and a final resolution.
- (c) Create characters. Write a one-page summary of each character, including a name, feature characteristics, motivations, and a basic storyline. Do half-page summaries for background characters.
- (d) Expand the summary paragraph described in step (b) by turning each sentence into its own paragraph, until you have a summary page. You're getting closer to a book proposal.
- (e) Write a one-page story summary for each character, telling the story from that character's point of view.
- (f) Turn the summary page in step (d) into a four-page book proposal. You should be working out more of the details and the logic of the plot.
- (g) Expand the character summaries in step (c) into fully detailed descriptions, so that the characters begin to seem like real people.
- (h) Break down the four-page book proposal into individual scenes, and start adding detail to those scenes. Create a list of all the necessary scenes for the novel, from beginning to end.
- (i) Start pounding out the first draft of your novel.
4. **Keep writing.** Write something for your novel every day: a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire chapter. Rewrite often, but don't edit your story out of existence. Rely on a writer's group and a close circle of "friendly editors" for assistance in deciding what should stay and what should go.
5. **Get published.** You can try the traditional route: write the book and then send it out to agents and publishers until someone recognizes you for the brilliant author you are.¹⁴ As a novice auteur, you'll probably have a better chance with a small, "niche" publisher that focuses on a certain genre, one area of the country, or a particular period in history. Your other option is to self-publish. Several online services can help you select a size, binding method, and cover design for

your book; determine a price and publishing run number; and market your book to booksellers around the world. Check out http://www.lulu.com/publish/index.php?cid=en_tab_publish, www.iuniverse.com, or www.2xlibris.com.

And Remember . . .

John Grisham's first novel, *A Time to Kill*, was rejected by multiple book publishers. He eventually got it published, and then along came Hollywood. Happy writing! ■

Jennifer J. Schafer is an attorney with Brown Powers, PLLC, in Petoskey, Michigan, practicing in real estate, family law, and civil litigation and appeals. She has taught Research, Writing & Analysis and Civil Litigation Preparation as an adjunct instructor in the paralegal program at North Central Michigan College for 10 years. She is also currently a member of the State Bar Representative Assembly and the Committee on Libraries, Legal Research, and Legal Publications.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alternative Lawyer Jobs, *Latest Jobs* <<http://www.alternativelawyerjobs.com>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed June 28, 2009.
2. Cogdill, *He's a Southern lawyer-turned-popular author, but John Hart is no Grisham*, *Popmatters.com*, May 6, 2009, available at <<http://www.popmatters.com/pm/article/92749-hes-a-southern-lawyer-turned-popular-author-but-john-hart-is-no-grish/>>.
3. Loyola University New Orleans School of Law, Office of Career Services, *Alternative Careers: 300+ Things You Can Do with a Law Degree*, available at <<http://law.loyno.edu/career/newsite/resource/pdf/altcar/altcar.pdf>>.
4. Keirsey.com, Keirsey Tempermant Sorter II <<http://www.keirsey.com/sorter/register.aspx>>.
5. Simply Hired, *Job Search Made Simple* <<http://www.simplyhired.com>>.
6. Monster, *Find Jobs* <<http://www.monster.com>>.
7. The Riley Guide, *Employment Opportunities and Job Resources on the Internet* <<http://www.rileyguide.com>>.
8. You can find similar resources and tools at both www.monster.com and www.careerbuilder.com.
9. Shameless self-promotion: you can view my profile at <<http://www.linkedin.com/in/jenniferjschafer>>.
10. Created with assistance from <<http://www.wikihow.com/Become-a-Writer>> and <<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Novel>>.
11. They even offer a section on writing greeting cards. Who would have thought?
12. Don't forget to check out the "Free Stuff for Writers" section.
13. Advanced Fiction Writing.com <<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/art/snowflake.php>>.
14. Protect your intellectual property before sending it to other people! Register your work with the Library of Congress at <<http://www.copyright.gov>>.