

## **Life Is Frustrating, Whether You're Creative or Not**

**By George Cunningham**

An editor told me years ago that one of the reasons that journalism is a frustrating profession is that it is semi-creative. If it were creative, journalists could write stories that would amaze and enrage their readers. But in journalism – at least in theory – the writer is constrained by the facts.

The journalist can't write that the mayor is taking bribes, even if it would make a very good story, unless the mayor is in fact taking bribes and the writer can prove it. Sure, a reporter can structure a story in a way that brings out the drama and controversy, but in the end he has to operate inside a box, and that box is made up of facts.

A novelist, on the other hand, can make up his own facts and his own characters. He can invent heroes and villains, winners and losers, and situations and circumstances. He can even invent towns, countries and entire planets that exist nowhere except in his mind.

But what many people don't recognize – including my old editor – is that fiction has its own restraints.

Once a novelist invents his character, once he gives him or her a personality and motivates him or her in a direction and puts him or her in a circumstance, the writer no longer has complete control. He has to share control with his character. He can have his character say brave things, but only if he has created a brave character. A 67-year-old spinster librarian, who needs help putting books on the top shelf, can't suddenly karate-chop a mafia hitman and blow up an illegal bomb factory.

In "Breakfast of Champions," novelist Kurt Vonnegut described the relationship as a writer being connected to his characters by "stale rubberbands." A writer can control his characters, but only within their own parameters.

What my old editor didn't get was that there are no creative or semi-creative jobs. There are just creative and semi-creative people. There are creative accountants, creative mathematicians, and creative parents, who take their skills and apply them in ways to achieve maximum results and satisfaction.

A year ago, my wife Carmela and I decided to go into the book publishing business. There are a lot of writers out there looking for outlets, which didn't surprise us. What did surprise us was that setting up the book publishing business itself is just as creative as the writing of the books. And just as frustrating.

Almost a year into it, we have accomplished a lot. We haven't made much money yet, but we have created something that provides us with a dream to pursue, a reason to pursue it, and a lot of enjoyment.

But before we get too carried away, let's make one thing perfectly clear. This is America and we are Americans. The satisfaction, the fun and the sense of accomplishment are great. But the money is the motivating factor. Whether we are creative or just semi-creative, we all want to be remunerated for our efforts.

That goes without saying.

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