

DRUNK WRITER TALK

TALK ABOUT BOOKS, MOVIES AND STORYTELLING BETWEEN WRITER FRIENDS WHO'VE DISCOVERED WHEN THEY DRINK TOGETHER THEY BECOME BRILLIANT. HERE WE SHARE SO OTHERS MAY ENJOY, DISCUSS, DISAGREE.



WEDNESDAY, MAY 05, 2010

Chevy Stevens Guest Blog

Hi. Maureen here. :)

A month or so ago, one of my writer friends, debut author [Chevy Stevens](#), was in Toronto on a pre-release promotional tour (yes! cool, right?), for her July 2010 release [STILL MISSING](#), and we managed to grab dinner together. Among other things, we got talking about all the weird misconceptions that people have about writing and publishing. (And all the helpful suggestions they offer like, "You should go on Oprah!")

Now that I'm thinking about it, people assuming that authors always get sent on book tours, never mind pre-release tours, is a misconception I've dealt with. ;) But at least now I personally know someone whose publisher has done that! I also had the privilege of reading Chevy's ARC and let me tell you, this one's worth all the buzz and is sure to

hit the lists. She just got starred reviews in [Publisher's Weekly](#) and [Library Journal](#), too!

But one of the misconceptions Chevy's come up against is: if you know how to write, you don't need anyone else's input. To which everyone who is in the business would say, whaaat??? This came up when the Globe & Mail did a [lovely feature](#) on her and she mentioned using a freelance editor before seeking an agent. There were a few random bloggers and commenters on the Globe's site who clearly had no idea how publishing works (and/or were jealous writers.) Anyway, I thought it might be fun to have Chevy stop by for a drink to talk about it.

Hey, Maureen! Thanks for having me. This is so cool—I've been reading you guys for years! Ah, yes, misconceptions. I think the one that gets me the most is that if you work with a critique group, hired a freelance editor, or revised for your agent then it's no longer YOUR book and you didn't actually write it yourself, which makes me scratch my head. Okay, it makes me do a lot more than that, but I'm on my first drink. Wait until I get warmed up!

They're aren't many trades that don't require learning from someone or getting feedback. Carpenters apprentice before they start building houses, plumbers too. They may have a natural aptitude for construction, but they still have to learn the skills. Great artists and magicians apprentice. My accountant's firm has a system where everything is checked over by another pair of eyes—twice. Olympic athletes have trainers, coaches, managers, nutritionist, and physical therapists. No one asks them if they really deserved to win the gold. Even sports teams have coaches. They run plays, study tapes, practice over and over again. On the occasions I've hired a personal fitness trainer I work harder and see better results. There's something about having someone standing over you yelling, "One more time!" that really fires me up. In movies there's the writer, the director, and then even an actor may bring something to the table. Chefs give people a taste of their creation, then adjust their ingredient accordingly.

Even when your final draft is bought by a publisher, your editor has feedback. Then there's a copy-editor and after that, a proofreader. And you know what? Stuff still gets

missed. I had to make two corrections last week because of errors readers found in my ARCs. One of them was a medical mistake that no one caught. You can't see everything that's wrong with your work. Sometimes you've been living with it for too long and other times it's because you only see things from your own life experiences. Until someone points out that your character sounds like a real bitch when she says X, Y, Z and people are going to want to stab her with a fork, you might have no clue. Getting feedback can teach you a lot about yourself and your way of viewing the world.

I don't work with a critique group because I live in a small town and don't know many people working on novels. I also like one on one attention. I can be demanding and impatient. That doesn't always work out well with writing partners! If I was to use an analogy, I'd say for me writing a book is like having an idea for a house, then building it and decorating it. When it's as perfect as I can get it, I invite a couple of people in to tell me if I missed a spot, if my ceiling is sagging, or if the front door is crooked. I'm careful whom I invite as the wrong person can make me feel like shit about my house, and I don't want someone who suggests I knock it down and build a condo because that's what they secretly want to build. I also like having someone who can explain why it's a bad idea to hook the toilet up to the sink and how I can get it to flush faster!

Once my beta readers have given me their feedback, I step back and think everything over. My natural reaction is always to want to slam the door in their face, so I take a moment, grab a tea, and when I'm ready, I go to work. A good freelance editor, beta reader, or critique partner might make comments like, "The kitchen seems too dark," or they might brainstorm with me and say "orange" would look good. Then I might think, "No, I hate orange, but I agree it needs to be brighter so I'm going to go with yellow." Then when I'm finally satisfied I'll invite guests in. But I'll still run around trying to straighten pillows and open curtains. I'm crazy like that. :)

Feedback is just that, feedback. You still have to find your own voice and figure out what works best for YOUR story. But getting feedback can sometimes help you figure out what the true essence of your story is, what is really, really important to you. It can be agonizing in the process. I once had someone suggest I get rid of all my shrink intros and just tell my story in real time. I considered it, because the intros weren't working. I

talked it over with a few people, tried to rewrite the book a few different ways, cried, ate too much food, and ultimately took six months, or so, to rewrite the intros so they were stronger.

There is no wrong or right way to write a book. If you want to use a critique group, go for it. If you want to hire a freelance editor, that's cool too. But if you hire a freelance editor, do your homework. Ask for a sample and testimonials, check them out on Predators and Editors— be smart about it. I would recommend finding someone who doesn't just point out flaws but teaches you why something isn't working. Then learn from them. It's also important they give you positive feedback or there's no light at the end of the tunnel! Not all editors, critique partners, or beta readers are created equally, so be clear what you're looking for and what works best for you. They're a relationship like any other. You still have to know yourself, know what you need and want, and be willing to do your part.

Okay, I'm thirsty now. Is it time for another drink?

Great observations, Chevy. And to answer your last question, it's always time for another drink. Especially when talking about writing and publishing. ;)

POSTED BY MAUREEN MCGOWAN AT 8:24 AM 

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<http://drunkwritertalk.blogspot.com/2010/05/chevy-stevens-guest-blog.html>