

How to Get Published

by Lily Quan

Writing may be a craft, but getting published is a business. That is the conclusion I have reached after researching the topic of how to get a book published. Unless authors choose the self-publishing route, they must be prepared to market and sell their manuscripts, because being a great writer is one thing, but being a published one is another.

Let's assume you have a full-length manuscript ready. The first step is to find out who to approach and how to approach them. Increasingly in Canada, the people to approach are literary agents rather than publishers. "Publishers depend on agents to vet material by unknown writers," according to Dean Cooke, a Toronto literary agent. The agents market the manuscripts to editors they think would be interested. "If [the manuscript] is coming from an agent, it's assumed to be worth taking a look at," says Cooke, whose authors include Richard Wright and Guy Vanderhaeghe.

Publishing houses have cut back on their editorial staff to the extent that there is no longer time to read and respond to the multitude of unsolicited submissions that arrive. Once, interns or editorial assistants were usually assigned to read unsolicited letters and manuscripts, or "the slush pile." Exceptional manuscripts were noted and passed on. But according to Cooke, this process, which includes logging and recording submissions, has become too time-consuming and inefficient for many publishers.

Authors generally sell their work by first sending out query letters. Query letters can be thought of as brief commercials for the work and for the authors themselves. A well-written query letter attracts the attention of an editor or agent, who then requests a copy of the manuscript.

According to Cooke, the best way to approach a literary agent is with what he terms a "smart" query letter. Smart query letters are not gimmicky, fluorescent, or perfumed (all of which he has received). In a smart query letter, writers should demonstrate that they have educated themselves about the publishing business. Writers should state their previous publications and workshops or courses they have taken. They can also cite industry professionals they have studied with. These are a writer's credentials. "Most writers push the novel, then bury the qualifications," Cooke says.

Cooke uses the analogy of dentistry. When looking for a dentist, you want someone who is a trained professional. You wouldn't choose someone who says, "I've always wanted to be a dentist." And yet phrases such as "I was born to be a writer" are common in the letters he sees.

At Cooke's agency, all query letters are read, even though the vast majority of unsolicited manuscripts are probably not publishable. But still, there is that chance of finding a gem, and so his agency continues to accept unsolicited submissions.

However, if you would like to submit to a publisher directly, it still is possible to do so, and your manuscript does not have to gather dust in the slush pile. An effective approach is to research the different publishers and editors, and to target the ones who would be open to your work. Maria Coletta McLean did just that. McLean is the author of two books and currently works at Penguin Canada. She chose to pitch her first book to editor Jackie Kaiser after reading the novel *Tamarind Mem*. In the acknowledgements, the author of *Tamarind Mem* thanked Kaiser for taking a chance on a new writer. McLean saw an opening and pitched



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her manuscript in a letter to Kaiser, noting Kaiser's openness to unknown authors. Kaiser responded and read her manuscript, providing feedback and encouragement. McLean's book, *My Father Came from Italy*, was eventually published by Raincoast Books. McLean's advice to new writers is to find out who publishes books that are similar to theirs. Then scan the acknowledgements of the books for names of editors who might be interested in their work. These are the editors to submit to.

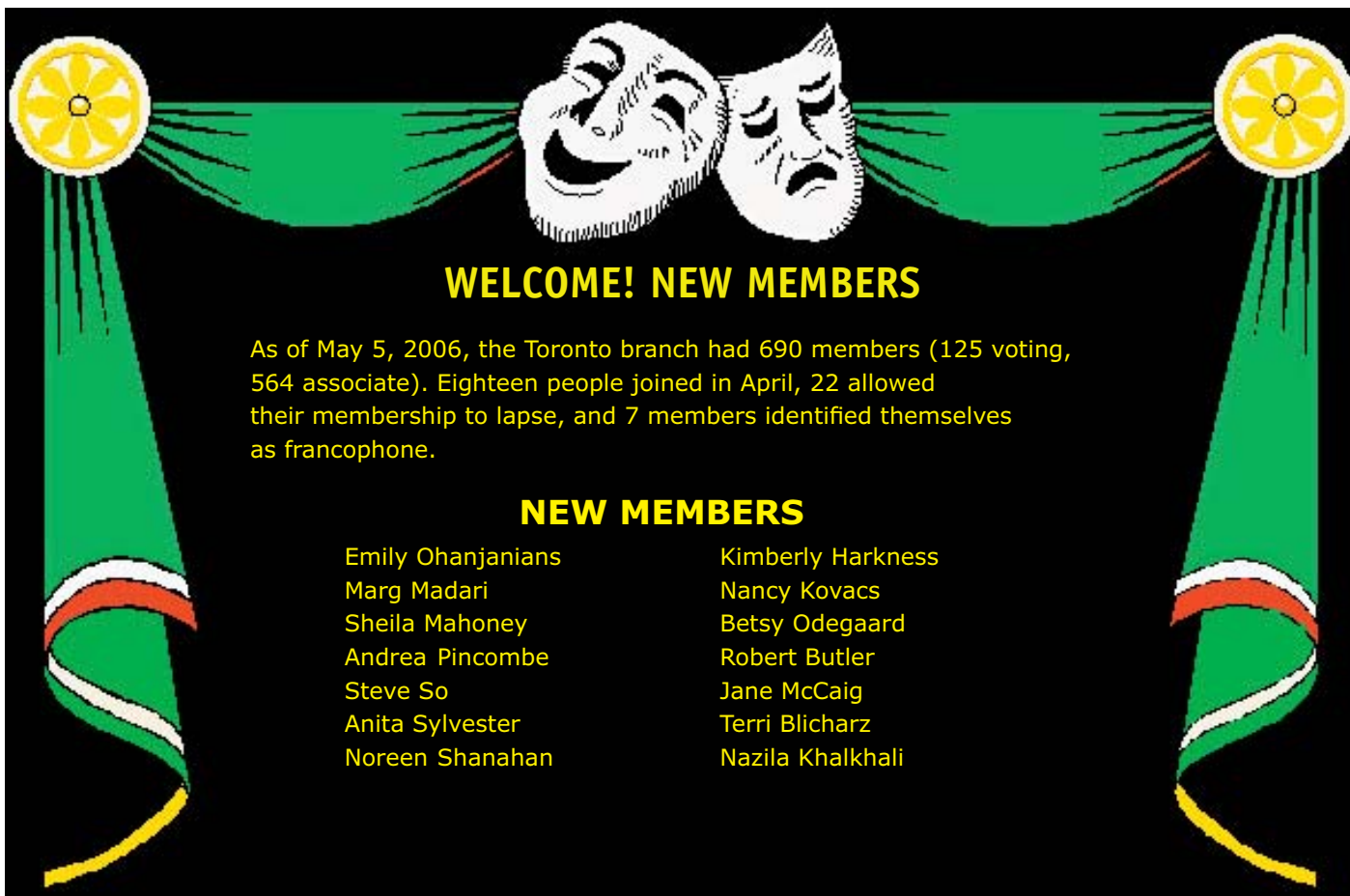
By doing your homework about the business, you have demonstrated that you are a professional who is knowledgeable about the industry—someone publishers will want to work with. That is the type of author publishers are looking for.

For more information about getting published, the following workshops are available:

What It Takes To Get Published presented by Daphne Hart and Althea Prince. June 17 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at The Toronto Writers' Centre, 101 Yorkville Avenue, Suite 200. 416 975-5172

The Insider's Guide to Getting Published presented by Cynthia Good. July 24 and July 25 from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Humber College, Lakeshore Campus. 416 675-6622 ext. 6622. E

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WELCOME! NEW MEMBERS

As of May 5, 2006, the Toronto branch had 690 members (125 voting, 564 associate). Eighteen people joined in April, 22 allowed their membership to lapse, and 7 members identified themselves as francophone.

NEW MEMBERS

Emily Ohanjanians	Kimberly Harkness
Marg Madari	Nancy Kovacs
Sheila Mahoney	Betsy Odegaard
Andrea Pincombe	Robert Butler
Steve So	Jane McCaig
Anita Sylvester	Terri Blicharz
Noreen Shanahan	Nazila Khalkhali