

Perils of Pauline Best Tips From *Writer's Dip into the Well* (with Bonus PR Tips from Jamie Engle)

Happy New Year! Jamie and I hope that these tips, culled from *Perils of Pauline's Writer's Dip into the Well* and from Jamie Engle's upcoming release, *Building Your Author Promotion Platform*, will provide a bit of inspiration for 2009.

Hope and Positive Thinking

1. "Keep your heart open to dreams. For as long as there's a dream, there is hope, and as long as there is hope, there is joy in living." **Anonymous**
2. Be happy where you are right now. The journey matters as much (or more) than the destination.
Be willing to take risks to get where you want to go.
Don't despair if you don't get there.
Instead, resolve to try harder.
Rejoice in every step forward.
Eat chocolate (or whatever your comfort is) when you get knocked back.
3. I'd like to talk about hope for writers this week, too. Hope is what keeps us writing things down and hope is what prompts us to submit to a publisher. Writing is a joy (and sometimes a pain), but the *business* of writing can kill **all** hope. Nurture your hope, protect it from the rejections, reviews you don't like, and the judgment of others. Hope must survive if you ever want to get published. And then keep getting published again and again.
4. My theme this week is positive thinking. I liked the Vince Lombardi quote ([below](#)), even though it is technically about habits. As authors, it is easy to fall into a habit of despair. This is one, tough business. The truth is, there will be times when you're the only one who will believe you can "make it," whatever "making it" means to you. While it is important to be realistic about your chances in some markets, it is also important to develop a spirit of optimism, to nurture the positive and keep it alive during the whole submit/get rejected process. I can't promise you that you'll get exactly what you want in this business, but you can get *something* if you refuse to give up. It is a fact that positive energy brings positive outcomes. If you're feeling despair, whether you mean to or not, that's what you'll project in your writing and in your submitting. Think about it. We're all drawn to positive people. Optimism is infectious. And it makes the journey a lot more fun. :-)
5. I've been thinking a lot about what it takes to hang in there when the story won't cooperate or it just seems too long to that moment when you can type "the end." In the dark reaches of the night, even knowing you have readers waiting for your book isn't enough. We all have to dig deep, at least once and usually more, to keep going in this business. Even published authors get rejected and/or have their moments of doubt. My oldest daughter calls it "pulling it out of your tush." It's pushing forward, despite the pain and refusing to be stopped *no matter who tells you no*.

6. January is a great time to ponder and set goals. Even though it is the middle of winter, there is still a feeling of a fresh start about a new year. One caution, though. When you're setting your goals, make sure to set goals that you can actually achieve. For instance, setting a goal to be published by the end of the year is unrealistic, unless you intend to self-publish. If you want a traditional publishing contract, a more realistic goal would be to commit to send out query letters to XX number of publishers and/or agents. I have heard that Jim Carey wrote on a slip of paper that he wanted to receive a million dollars for a movie by a certain date. He put the slip in his pocket and achieved that desire. There is something that happens by writing down our desires and our goals, a sort of synergy in our heads. We work on a conscious and an unconscious level. But to avoid getting discouraged, be sure you know the difference between a desire and a goal. :-)
7. I find myself curiously devoid of writing advice this week. I think my well is dry. Too much happening in my personal life, and not enough filling of the inner well. So maybe that is my advice for this week: take time to fill your inner well, take time to refresh your spirit. No guilt trips this week for any of us, okay?
8. It's really hard not to look at highly successful authors and dream of being one of them, of making it big. And authors **should dream**. Otherwise, why write? Why try if you can't hope? But to keep writing when things don't turn out exactly as you hope, well, that's the challenge. I know I write about this a lot. That's because I deal with it a lot in my own writing career. I pour my heart into my books and then hope a lot. I'm grateful to be published. Grateful my books sell and that each book seems to do better than the last. Grateful I'm with publishers who give my books time to find readers. Grateful for reviewers and blog sites that give me boosts when they can. But in the end, the only thing I can actually control is how I feel about what I do. I choose to be happy. :-)

What to do, what to write

1. What you write will depend a great deal on your publishing goals. If you want to sell to a big publisher, you will need to write to the market--or write so far out of the box, they have to have you (such a Jasper Fforde or JK Rowling). If you need to write what you want to write, then small press or self publication may be the best route for you. Be sure to do research before you submit to **any** publisher, agent or self publishing press if you want to have a positive publishing experience. [Preditors and Editors](#) is a good place to start your research.

Business of Writing

Since our book [Managing Your Book Writing Business](#) is releasing this month, my tip will be about why it is important to manage your business. Some authors ease into the business in much the same way you ease into cold water. Others dive in, sometimes without even dipping a toe in to check the water. We all agree that writing is a business that chooses you and once in, you're pretty much addicted. So, having chose it, then why worry about setting up a business when you haven't even started making

money?The main reason is to protect your future assets from your present ignorance. Early choices, based on random acts and not informed choice, can close doors, limit opportunities and result in loss of control of your product--sometimes for years. Taking a little effort now to learn the business and make informed choices can also help you keep your focus when it all seems overwhelming and not great.

Editing

1. A writing friend is going through edits, which are both pleasure and a pain! One resource I go back to again and again is *Self-editing for Fiction Writers*. It's on my shelf on and number three on my [Tattered Covers](#) list. What I particularly like about this book, as an aid to self-editing, is that each chapter has a check list at the end. I go through each chapter, then go through my manuscript, focusing ONLY on the items covered in that chapter. When I get burned out, I step away from the book for a bit and try to clear my brain by working on something else. The other thing to remember, when editing, is break it down into small pieces. It won't seem so overwhelming. And last, but not least, you can't edit empty pages, so rejoice that you have words to edit. :-)
2. If you're having trouble finding the typos and other errors in your manuscript, try turning it upside down and reading from right to left. Reading out loud also helps you find missed words.

PR Tips by Jamie Engle

1. You are your book's best advocate. Don't be afraid to present it to the world and do promotion on its behalf.
2. Put your book's title and your URL in your e-mail signature. Include a great quote from the book as well.
3. Build a web site and include the basics: a bio page and a page for each of your books. If possible, expand with a press room and blog. Graphics are big; include pictures when possible, but not so many that the page download time bogs down.
4. Starting a blog is easy – posting regularly is not. Traffic dies off when posts are sporadic, so commit to a regular posting schedule.
5. Just like you have to drive traffic to your web site, you have to drive traffic to your blog to make it a successful promotion tool. Regular posts and leaving comments on other blogs are two ways to drive traffic to your blog.
6. When pitching local newspapers, stress the local angle. Do you live in the town? Are you making an appearance in the town? Do you have relatives in town? Did you work in the town? Put your local angle in the first paragraph.
7. Besides the local angle, newspapers love graphics. Include photos in your news release, keeping in mind editors prefer action shots to posed shots.
8. It's hard to get media attention for fiction books than it is nonfiction books. For fiction books, find the nonfiction angle. Is your main character a chef? Use the food angle to attract attention. Look to your research: did you do something interesting while researching, or gain access to a

relatively inaccessible or rarely accessible place? Exploit the nonfiction parts of your fiction world for promotion.

9. Always carry business cards or postcards with your name, URL, contact and book information. Be ready to hand them out.
10. Speaking engagements are a wonderful sales tool. Develop a speaking engagement presentation (including handouts). Book segments at local libraries, organizations, associations, schools and businesses.

Critique Groups/Getting Reviewed

1. Critique groups can be a wonderful support for an author...or a nightmare. The best way to tell if a group is working for you is to ask yourself, did the session make me feel excited to get back to work on my book?

If you feel discouraged and ready to quit, it may be too soon in the writing process for a critique. Critiquing is important **when** you can't get any further on your own. Keep in mind that some people thrive in critique groups, but like our books, one size does **not** fit all. Good critiques empower. Bad critiques defeat.

2. Not everyone is going to like everything you write. This includes agents, editors, reviewers and readers. Writing is such a personal endeavor; it is hard to filter out the negative. It's really hard to figure out what is *constructive* criticism and what is *destructive* criticism, though some seem able to filter out both. When someone, anyone makes suggestions about how you should change your work, consider how the advice makes you feel? Do you feel excited? Perhaps you say, aha! You realize that's exactly what was needed. This is good/constructive criticism. But if the advice/critique makes you feel despair, defeated and wanting to give up, this is advice you need to throw away.
3. As reviews for my new book begin to arrive in my email box, I thought handling reviews might be a good topic for discussion. Having your work judged by anyone is a good news/bad news event. It's hard to get ready for and harder to take if your work is judged less than you'd like. I've been pretty lucky in the reviews I've received, but also had reviews that were like a hit to the chin. As hard as it is, always try to be grateful that someone took the time to read your work. Look for what they did like about it and focus on that. Let the negative go. Don't let a bad review wound your muse or sense of self. It is just an opinion. Not everyone is going to like your work. You can't please all the people all the time. Sometimes all you can do is please yourself and hope. Keep hope in your heart. If you get a strong reaction from reviewer, well, at least they weren't indifferent. Write with passion, with personal integrity, be true to your own vision of your work and be happy you can write, be happy to be published and in position to be reviewed. And whatever you do, don't answer back to a bad review. If you have to respond, write the email, then delete it. And get back to work on the next project. :-)

4. One of the hardest things you'll face in this business is criticism. It would be nice if we could be immune to it, or only hear the parts of it that will help us make our work better. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way. I don't know why we give more weight to the negative, than we do to the positive, but many of us do, myself included. I can pretty much remember almost every negative comment I've gotten on my work, but have to go read my reviews to get the positive. It should be the other way around. One thing I've been known to do is print out positive comments and inspiring quotes and tape them on my monitor, where I can read them before I start work. If I have to, I mentally argue with the negative until it is small and defeated. If we didn't believe we had something worth telling, we wouldn't even try to write. The trick is to take that belief and nurture it and keep it alive in a business known for the heavy winds of adversity. You are the only one who can do it, but you don't have to do it alone. Surround yourself with supportive people (and weed out the naysayer's!). And don't be afraid to let yourself enjoy the wild ride! :-)

Pitching and Selling

1. Pitching a book to an editor or agent is probably one of the hardest parts of writing. Really. Condensing hundreds of pages of story into a one or two line pitch and/or a one page synopsis can feel like shoving your feet into shoes that are too small. But it can be done. To create a great pitch you need to focus on the broad outlines of the story, not the specifics. This is the time to paint in broad, even slightly fuzzy strokes. Too much information just gives the editor/agent something to nitpick. I use screenwriting techniques to craft my pitch/synopsis. If you're really stuck, check out Syd Field's *The Screenwriter's Workbook*. It really helped me breakdown my story into pitchable, easy-to-synopsisize parts. Well, not easy, but easier.
2. This week, my various writing loops are discussing query letters, why we read what we read, and camels...well, actually the camels got looped into a discussion on technical support from...out of the US. This week, my tip is, if you don't belong to a writers group, either real time or online, you're missing out. There is a wealth of expertise available to you with the click of a mouse. Some of my favorites: Sisters in Crime Guppies, World Romance Writers, Sisters in Crime Internet Chapter, Muse Conference Online, Absolute Write. These are just a small sampling of what's out there. To look them up, just type the name into Google or your favorite search engine. Or, type in your genre of writing and find those like-minded souls who will help you navigate this crazy business a little bit more efficiently. :-)
3. I [blogged](#) today about some things to expect--and not expect--from a publisher. Some might take this as pro-publisher, but I'm also a huge advocate of author's rights. I've been known to be almost radical. <g> Just because I believe authors deserve better treatment, doesn't mean I don't also recognize the realities of this business. And actually, most of my advice is, IMHO, pertinent to any business enterprise. But if you don't agree, let me know. And tell me why. :-)

4. One of the things new (and even not-so-new) writers are always being told is to attend conferences. There are great benefits to meeting with others of your kind, sharpening your skills and making contacts. But we don't always have the money to travel to a conference. That's why it is a great thing when the conference comes to you. And what could be better than an online conference? Well, one that is completely **FREE**. Check it out! Registration closes August 1st! [The Muse Online Writers Conference](#)
5. One of the questions that come up a lot on the lists, "Why didn't anyone warn/tell me there was a problem with XYZ Publisher?" Information is important currency to authors. It can save us time--or cost us time and opportunity. Information can also be the killing blow to a small press publisher. There is no magic formula for how to foresee if a publisher is healthy or about to disappear. All of us struggle with how and when is the "right" time to share what we know or what we've heard. While it can be fun to be "in the know," spreading information that you don't know is true can have devastating effects on a small press working with a thin profit margin in a hostile environment. Rumors can even take down a **healthy** small press. If you've ever played "Gossip" as a child, then you know how quickly information can get distorted, even by well-meaning individuals. My best advice is: don't pass on information until **YOU** have personal proof that something is wrong. And then be careful how you share that information and who you share it with. If your careless words caused harm, you could get sued.

Long Term Planning

I got this link to [Neil Gaiman's blog](#) where he had a great discussion on Intellectual property rights. I mention it in my "All the World's a Page" Blog for this week, too. Certainly worth thinking about. I printed out his sample will, to add to my current will. Hey, we're all going to famous, even if we have to die to make it, right?

Bonus Health Tip

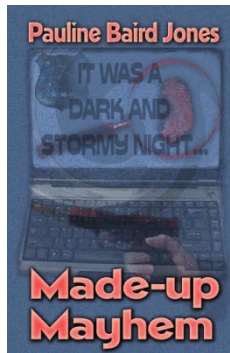
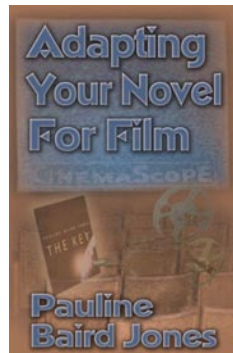
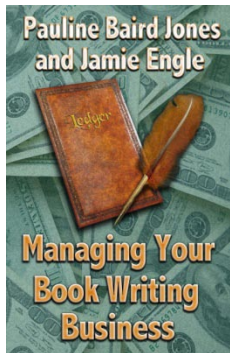
So many authors I know have carpal tunnel or other repetitive work related pain from sitting at desks all day. I used to have carpal tunnel syndrome, too. I had it bad enough, that I wore braces at night. Lucky for me, before I was forced into the surgery route, my sister found this amazing book. To read more about my experiences with carpal tunnel syndrome and chronic pain, [click here](#).

About Jamie Engle

Jamie Engle is a freelance writer, Public Relations specialist and award-winning journalist and photographer living in North Texas. She does Public Relations for a variety of industries, including restaurants and food-related ventures, authors, NPOs and commercial businesses. She has contributed chapters to three different books on publishing and has a short story in the Denton Writers League 2009 anthology. She has regular gigs at Kirkus Reviews, Sacramento Book Review and ChefTalk.com. Contact Jamie at jamie_engle@tx.rr.com.

About Pauline Jones

Pauline Baird Jones is the award-winning author of eight novels of action-adventure, suspense, romantic suspense and comedy-mystery. She's also written two non-fiction books, *Adapting Your Novel for Film* and *Made-up Mayhem* which will release in print in 2008. Her seventh novel, *Out of Time*, an action-adventure romance set in World War II, is an EPPIE 2007 winner in the single title/mainstream category. Her eighth novel, *The Key*, released in 2007 from LL Dreamspell, and Independent Book Award Bronze Medal Winner for 2008. Find Pauline at <http://www.perilouspauline.com> or e-mail her at pauline@paulinebjones.com



Building Your Author Promotion Platform coming in 2009!

Check out Perilous Pauline's fiction at: <http://www.perilouspauline.com>