



Getting an Agent is a Community Effort

by Kathleen O'Keefe Kanavos

ON REWRITES & SECURING AN AGENT

Writing a book is like having a baby. It took me two years and nine drafts to get my child noticed. Raising that child to become successful can be a community effort.

My baby is *Surviving Cancerland: The Psychic Aspects of Healing*. My non-fiction book is about my journey through breast cancer, survival and recurrence. The community that helped me "send it off" was the Cape Cod Writers Center and CapeWomenOnline Magazine.

It all started with courses I took at the Writer's Conferences at Craigsville, Pitching your Work to an Agent, and culminated at a cocktail party hosted by the Writer's Center to introduce Cape writers to New York literary agents.

I was vacationing in Palm Beach when I received the email invitation. I filled it out and sent it back to the Center. However, my computer and the Writer's Center computer were not WORD compatible. And that is when the fun began.

The documents I emailed never arrived. Four attempts later I thought we had victory. Due to no fault of her own, the Writer's Center secretary assumed it all went through, too. NOT!

"When is the cocktail party?" my husband asked as we packed our suitcases and four cats for the flight home to Cape Cod. "Friday at 5:30. We'll have a day to rest if we don't have any flight delays." I answered. No flight delays? Maybe, in a perfect world. Now back to reality...

Our plane landed at Logan Airport five hours late and we began our drive home at 3:00am with four wide-awake cats. The party was only fifteen hours away.

"Maybe we should skip this party tonight," my husband said. "I'm so tired I can hardly see straight. Where are my socks?"

"Not a chance." I answered and pointed to his sock-covered feet.

We were greeted at the door of the Antique B&B on route 6A by the secretary who had worked hard to get my book proposal into the agent's hands. "The agent you will be meeting with tomorrow is Jack Scovil of Scovil, Galen and Ghosh Literary Agency (www.sggllit.com). He's standing by the bar in the tortoise shell rimmed glasses."

I surveyed the room and saw that Jack was heads above anyone else in height. I made my way across the room, introduced myself, and we exchanged business cards. He asked if I planned to attend his class at 9:00am the next morning on book proposals and query letters.

"Of course, I am." I replied. Actually, I had planned to sleep in.

The next day, I entered class late, eyes barely open, and there were only two seats left unoccupied...right next Jack Scovil. I sat down. "Each of your chapter summaries should be between one and two pages," he continued.

Things were not going well.

"When you query an agent, research them. Use their names and remember, flattery will get you everywhere," he continued. Fortunately, despite my fatigue, I had done that after the party last night and used Jack's name in my query letter. Things were looking up.

I still wondered if someone of his caliber would be interested in my little first-person narrative nonfiction cancer book. I also knew that I had his undivided attention for 20 minutes during my scheduled meeting with him and I planned to pick his brain dry.



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"What's in your large notebook?" he asked at our meeting, later that day.

"I've researched publishing companies who will take my manuscript without an agent. But I would prefer to work with someone who can get me into the big publishing houses." I replied.

"That is the first reason that I am here. The second is to get feedback concerning my book proposal before I send it out later this week."

Jack sat quietly for a moment and then said, "I'd love to give you feedback on your proposal, but I never received it."

I was mortified. The computer incompatibilities had left my documents in cyberspace! There was nothing to discuss, no "pitch" to be made. No deal to be done. It was over.

"I don't want to waste your time. So, I'll just leave and let the next person come in," I stammered and shut my huge notebook. Mr. Scovil countered with, "No, no. Tell me about your book."

He folded his hands and leaned toward me like a child waiting for a bedtime story. I used everything I had learned from the Writer's Conference classes at Craigville on "Pitching Your Work to Agents" and pitched mine like a pro.

I began with my tagline; "My book is like *Why I Wore Lipstick to My Mastectomy* with a big psychic twist. The main storyline is about how I used information from my dreams and 'spiritual guides' to self advocate and challenge the medical community."

After I'd finished he asked, "Is the manuscript completed?"

"Yes. It's polished and ready to go."

"Is your book proposal done and ready to go?"

"Yes," I answered with my fingers crossed.

"Great. Send it to me. I'm very interested."

So I did...after pulling an "all-nighter" to perfect my chapter summaries.

Two and a half weeks and a phone call later, I was in Mr. Scovil's Fifth Avenue, Manhattan office. The conference room was filled with books the Agency had published. I remember Jack describing his agency as "a medium sized agency." Jack was being very humble. All the books lining the walls told a different story.

An hour and a contract later, my baby was well on its way into the big world of publishing and I was a client of Scovil, Galen and Ghosh Literary Agency.

But that was not the end of my work. In fact, it was just the beginning of the next phase - helping my agent get the book into a publishing house.

One of the first things I had to do was expand the marketing plan portion of my book proposal. I found the books available in bookstores on proposals very unhelpful. My biggest asset was my husband's knowledge of marketing analysis outlines from his real estate development business.

Why is a marketing outline so important to publishers? Publishing houses are not in the business of publishing books, they are in the business of MAKING MONEY. I had to show in the marketing section that I had identified my book's audience.

What was the quickest and best way to reach this audience after I had identified it? The internet! FaceBook for social networking (Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos), Twitter for business networking (PsychicHealing), I Blog, MySpace, YouTube (PsychicSurvivor), and a web site (being developed by 720 Media) that can all be linked to interactive websites from groups that are a part of the book's audience. My next job was to network, network, network!

I've worked hard to get to this point, and when my book is published, I will have more work to do: book tours, interviews, and public speaking engagements.... But I believe that without CapeWomenOnline Magazine providing me a forum to improve my writing skills and the Writer's Center giving me a way to meet the agents, I'd still be looking for an agent and my baby would still be at home, with me.

In the next issue of Cape Women Online Magazine I will outline the marketing section of a book proposal.

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