

7 PM Mountain Time, January 6/05

A transcript of the chat with Jenna follows:

### **BIROL**

Hello, welcome to the AbsoluteWrite's inaugural chat featuring as your guest speaker this evening Jenna Glatzer, owner of AbsoluteWrite and multi-published author. If everyone could take their virtual seats, we can get started.

As a reminder, this is a moderated chat with a guest speaker so voice capabilities has been deactivated. You will not be able to type in the main window. Individuals may still Private Message (PM) one another. You may PM each other by double-clicking on a user's id. A new window will open up allowing you to converse with just that member.

I will be serving as the moderator-host for this evening's chat. Should you have a question for Jenna, you may PM them to me. Please do not PM the guest speaker (Jenna). You may PM your questions to me at any time during the chat. I will hold them for the Q&A session after Jenna's talk.

If you are having any technical difficulties or the person sitting behind you refuses to quit kicking the back of your seat no matter how many times you ask, please PM MacAllister. She will be serving as our moderator-moderator (otherwise known as help desk, bouncer, and other duties as assigned) for this chat.

If there are any other mods present, please de-op yourself at this time in order to avoid any confusion.

At the end of tonight's chat, we will have a trivia question. The first person with the correct answer will receive a copy of Jenna's latest book *The Street Smart Writer: Self-Defense Against Sharks and Scams in the Writing World*.

I truly think among this group Jenna Glatzer is an individual who needs no introduction, though many of us may not know quite as much about her as we think. She is the owner of AbsoluteWrite and our beloved Water Cooler, the editor of multiple newsletters, and a talented ghost- and non-fiction writer. Her books include *Fear Is No Longer My Reality*, co-written with Jamie Blyth, *Conquering Panic and Anxiety Disorders*, *Make a Real Living As A Freelance Writer*, *Celiné Dion: For Keeps*, *The Street Smart Writer*, and the children's book *Hattie, Get A Haircut!*

I now turn tonight's chat over to Jenna.\*

### **JENNA**

After more than 3,700 posts, I can't believe you still want to hear more from me. But I'm delighted, so here we go. If I'm going too fast, please PM Birol (just double-click on her name) and she can tell me to slow down.

I'm going to talk today about stage fright, and how it relates to being a writer. As some of you know, I never intended to become a writer. The love of my life was the theatre, and I wanted nothing more than to be an actress. Broadway, films, little dinner theatres, didn't matter to me. I just wanted to perform.

I started acting at age 4. My dad was a director, and he recruited me to play a small role in the play *Teahouse of the August Moon*. I had two lines to speak, in Japanese, and I was charged with bringing a goat out on stage. The goat, however, had terrible stage fright, and refused to budge.

It took all the strength in my 4-year-old body to drag that goat out, and it must have been quite a sight, because by the time I managed, the whole audience was hooting and stomping and applauding. For me! Boy, was I hooked. I began auditioning for every play in town (even if they didn't have goats).

Only problem was, as I got a little older, my stage fright was worse than the goat's. Before auditions, I would have to visit the bathroom 15 times. My hands and knees and voice would shake, my heart would race, and I would have the darnedest time making my way to the stage to perform my song for the director and crew.

But somehow I almost always managed to do well. I landed lead roles most of the time. Performance nights were even worse, though... just before my first entrance, you could always find me crouched down backstage, just trying to tame my bladder. At least twice, I didn't succeed. That was... embarrassing.

I remember one of the stage crew members finding me this way, and being incredulous. "But you always get the lead roles!" she said. "I can't believe you're so nervous!" Well, the thing was, it was the most important thing in my life. Theatre mattered to me in a way that nothing else did. I felt extremely vulnerable out there on stage, and I desperately wanted that audience to love me.

I didn't want to be good; I wanted to be great. And I was never sure of myself. The audience's reactions were what I lived for, and I obsessed about them. I was terrified about cracking on the high notes, worried about forgetting a line. I was never, ever satisfied with my performances.

My mom hated visiting me backstage after a show, because she knew I'd be there fretting about a note I didn't hit quite right, or a song that wasn't as strong as it should have been. Sometimes she asked why I did this to myself. If I was so terrified, and so prone to beating myself up afterwards, why? Because I never felt so alive anywhere else.

Stage fright was something entirely different from panic disorder, though, which hit completely without warning and at inopportune times. Panic disorder led to agoraphobia, and I wound up having to quit the job I loved dearly (I was acting in a children's theatre at the time). I moved back in with my parents because I couldn't be independent anymore.

A college professor of mine had told me that I was going to be a writer. And now, housebound, I couldn't think of any other career choice, so I began researching and reading books about writing. "Maybe I could be a writer," I thought. I began writing and submitting.

There was a reason I was never happy with my performances. When you're terrified, your throat gets tight, and the notes don't flow the way they could if you were relaxed. When you're constantly worried about sounding "right" and impressing people, you can't take the risks that lead to greatness.

When I got that first writing assignment-- an article for a magazine-- I reacted similarly. I wanted to impress the editor, so I used lots of big words and tried to be clever and sound "smart." Instead, the article was tremendously stilted.

"Stilted" is the word for "trying too hard." It's what happens when you're trying to get an A-plus, so you write very formally and without personality, clutching a thesaurus. It's what happens when you try to sound like a writer, instead of trying to sound like you.

I got very lucky. The editor probably should have just rejected the article outright, but he didn't. He told me gently that it sounded more like a press release than an article, and that the tone was way too serious. This magazine was informal in style, and the piece needed some humor and

breathing room in between all the facts. I rewrote it entirely and it was accepted.

My self-worth as an actress was tied into audience reactions. If they gave me a standing ovation, I was good. If they didn't laugh at the funny lines, I thought it meant that I stunk. But the truth is that audiences don't always react the way they "should." Sometimes you get a quiet audience that doesn't react even if you give them the best performance of your life, and other times, you get a boisterous audience that pays no attention to the fact that people messed up their lines and hit flat notes.

Of course you want to strive to do your best every time, but you can't let other people's reactions define you. Somehow, I approached my writing differently than I approached acting. When I auditioned for a role and didn't get it, I was crushed. But when I submitted a piece and got a rejection, I didn't think much of it. Sure, it was disappointing, but I don't ever remember thinking I was a worthless failure because one editor didn't like my work.

Yet I get it. Other writers would tell me how terrified they were to submit something, and I'd understand what they meant only because of what I went through with my acting. Those writers were getting their self-worth all tied into what an editor thought. They were terrified to be that vulnerable, to hand over something so personally meaningful and have it sent back with an impersonal rejection letter.

Maybe I've gained perspective over the years. Maybe it's because writing wasn't my original dream that I'm able to take things less personally. I don't know which, but here are some things I do know:

1. One rejection, or ten, or twenty, means nothing. They are not commentaries on your talent or your worth as a writer. If they come with critiques, use what's valuable and toss the rest. Know that every writer goes through rejection. Know that some of the most famous writers throughout history have also been some of the most rejected writers. They just stuck with it.
2. The more you worry about trying to be impressive, the less able you will be to write authentically. Readers do not need writers who sound like other writers. There is no precedent for your writing. Learn the craft, read books, take classes, but when it comes down to it, trust your pen. Copy no one's style but your own.
3. Be patient with yourself. You may not know what your style is yet. You may not be comfortable with your voice yet. That's okay. The cure for that is more writing.
4. If you write while picturing an unsympathetic audience, writing will become a chore. For most of us, there's a little critic on our shoulders as we write. That critic may be your idea of an editor or agent or reviewer who's out to prove that you're a fraud and every word you write is stupid. If you tell a child every day that he is bad, he becomes bad. So it is with writing. Kick the critic in the teeth and get on with it.
5. Validation must come internally. Think of a writer you love. Chances are very high that that writer received dozens of rejection letters before the first acceptance. Was this writer an untalented hack before that first acceptance letter? Was it the acceptance that made the writer talented? We all crave outside validation, but first you need to believe what you're writing is worthy, or it'll be very hard to stick with it and keep submitting your work.
6. The way to believe that is to earn it. Writing requires sweat equity. Almost no one starts out by pumping out a first draft and having it proclaimed a masterpiece. Dumping all those ideas down on the page may be the fun part, but it's far from the most important part. You prove you're a writer by rewriting. And rewriting. And possibly realizing that manuscript is awful and you need to write something new. And rewrite it. Show your story it's worthy by polishing it until it shines.

Never stop learning from others. Welcome feedback, and read like crazy.

7. Don't compare. When I was acting, I was constantly comparing myself to others-- was I as good as she was? Could I ever be as good as so-and-so? Compare yourself today to yourself last year, not to someone else. If you spend your time trying to measure up to someone else, you can't find out what it is that makes your writing unique and important.

8. Once you've sent a manuscript out, forget it exists. It does no one any good for you to sit around obsessing about what the editor or agent is thinking, whether there were typos you missed, how soon you're allowed to follow up, etc. Allow yourself to move on to the next project. That's the best treatment for post-submittal anxiety.

A little bit of stage fright is good-- it keeps you from sending out your first draft all over town and forces you to proofread your query letters. But don't let it interfere with your writing or submissions. Hold your head high, and if all else fails, picture the editors in their underwear (hey, those old acting tricks have to be handy some time!).

Thus endeth the lesson. Now I'm going to open up the floor for questions-- of all sorts. Please feel free to ask whatever you like about my life, writing, anything. Just PM your questions to Birol and she'll post them for you. When I'm finished answering a question, I'll type \*.

#### **BIROL**

Jenna, the first question is, what type of underwear do you picture the editors in? 😊

#### **JENNA**

LOL. Preferably floral bloomers.

#### **BIROL**

(I haven't received a great many questions -- Ah, there they come.)

#### **BIROL (SHAI?)**

This was a great piece. Can you post a transcript of it at the website?

#### **JENNA**

You bet. Thanks!

#### **BIROL/(TIMANDRA)**

How do you handle the fear and pain of sharing what is most precious?

#### **JENNA**

Ooh, good question. While I'm writing it, it's personal and precious... but the moment I submit it, I am able to put it in a different "category" in my head-- It's no longer my heart that I'm offering to strangers. It's a product. A piece of writing. I'm able to see it as something separate from myself.

If it gets rejected, it's not \*me\* or my experience that's being invalidated-- it just means that those particular words weren't right for that particular editor at that particular time. (And, of course, I then believe that that editor is TOTALLY MISSING OUT! 😊)

While I'm submitting, I'm writing the next piece and the next, so I don't have all my hopes tied to one piece. I think it becomes easier to detach from the process the more you do it.

**BIROL**

There was a request to name the individuals asking the questions. I will do my best. The first questioner chooses to remain anonymous (no, it wasn't me).

**JENNA**

Yeah, who asked the underwear question?! 😊 LOL. Charrrrrlie?

**BIROL**

The second question, about fear and panic, was Timandra.

**JENNA**

Cool. Thanks, Timandra!

**BIROL**

The third.... I'm afraid I forget... So sorry. I had lots of windows popping up then.

**JENNA**

Actually, I think those are the only two so far.

**BIROL**

Okay, well the third one, I didn't mark the identity for... They can claim it when they see it. I've marked the identity of the questioner for all the rest, but if you would prefer to remain anonymous, please let me know.

Also, I must say, both Mac and Charlie are innocent of that first question, too. 😊 Moving on...

**JENNA**

*\* JennaG will keep guessing, privately.*

**BIROL/JEN**

Will international writers benefit much from your latest book? Or has it been written with the American market in mind? Thanks.

**JENNA**

From the Street-Smart Writer? I believe it's applicable to all writers. The scams and dangers for writers are pretty universal.

Thanks! \*

**BIROL**

That last question was from Jen. Thanks, Jen.

### **QUEENB**

Since your background was in theatre, have you ever tried your hand at writing plays? (I'm a theatre teacher/director/actor myself, and write plays.)

### **JENNA**

Oooh, yes! I've had two short plays produced, and it was amazing to see. The director and actors did things differently than I had imagined when I wrote the plays. Was very cool to sit in the audience and hear reactions, too.

I haven't tried writing a full-length play yet-- mostly monologues and shorts. But someday. \*

### **ELINCOLN**

Did you ever imagine AW to be such a great resource when you first conceived it? Or was it a "I'll make this website and hope someone finds something." kind of thing?

### **JENNA**

Totally the second. It started out as something entirely different-- I had this little Geocities page to promote my screenplays. I hoped to attract agents and producers to read my stuff. Well, that didn't happen. But oddly, it attracted a great deal of traffic from writers... They kept writing to ask questions about how I got a script optioned, or what a query letter should look like, or formatting questions... Eventually I realized that I should just forget about promoting my own stuff and start a genuine site for writers.

It began as a Geocities site again-- "The Screenwriting Spot." But my interests grew-- I wasn't just writing screenplays, I was writing articles, greeting cards, etc. So I bought the domain absolutewrite.com and it's grown beyond my wildest expectations.

It's always been a labor of love. I'm glad that I get to share it with so many people! \*

### **KELVIN**

I want to release my name to the public. How do you write for magazines? If you have any advice, for freelancers, where can one write? This is more of like a teenage freelancer.

### **JENNA**

Big question. Two places I can direct you: First, there's a section on Absolute Write that has lots of articles and interviews about writing for magazines.

[http://www.absolutewrite.com/freelance\\_writing/freelance\\_writing1.htm](http://www.absolutewrite.com/freelance_writing/freelance_writing1.htm). I have a "beginner's guide" in the articles section.

Second is my book, Make a Real Living as a Freelance Writer, which shares everything I know about writing for magazines. \*

### **TIMANDRA**

Regarding the connection between writing and acting, writers began as reciting singer/poets. Timandra was a hetaira, Greek courtesan who composed and recited. Do you feel the need to recite, to share what you create on the spot like a hetaira?

## **JENNA**

Ha! Neat question. I don't usually recite my writing out loud until the end, when I'm checking for typos, bad syntax, etc... but I'm forever "acting" it in my head. \*

## **WILLIAM**

What was the impetus for TSSW? Was it an outgrowth of your awareness of PA? Of other "beware" type forums? From personally being burnt at some point in your career?

## **JENNA**

A few things converged-- first, my editor for Make a Real Living asked me to write this book... she (Nomad) is active on our boards, and felt there was a need for something like this because of what she saw on the Bewares board... she had mentioned it kind of casually. I wasn't sure I wanted to get into it at the time... about a year later, I had completely forgotten she ever mentioned it, and I wrote to her to propose this book idea... "I think it should be a warning guide for writers, like an extension of the Bewares board..." she politely did not say, "You idiot. I gave you that idea a year ago."

But anyway... Yes, I was burned myself, 3 notable times.

1. I submitted to the International Library of Poetry when I was 10... My mom shelled out for the book and all. This was the earlier incarnation of Poetry.com.
  - I paid an "agent" a fee of about \$250 for "upfront expenses"-- he never submitted my work anywhere and made me feel like I was an unprofessional pain in the butt when I asked him where my work was going.
  - I signed with a completely clueless screenwriting agent on the basis of fabricated credits. She turned around and tried to steal a deal I had brought in (a rewrite assignment)... quite a messy and weird situation.

But it wasn't until I got involved with PublishAmerica that I realized how prevalent the problem was, and how much it could really affect someone's life, and cause people to doubt their writing talents (by "got involved," I mean that I began reading stories from people who were stung by PA, and trying to help them.) So, it was sort of all of the above. \*

**BIROL** In a related question...

## **ROBIEA**

How much do your efforts regarding PA cost you professionally (time, energy, etc.)?

## **JENNA**

Wooo. Another great question. Truth is that it takes up way too much of my time and mental energy to be healthy... I can't fully explain why I care so much about the issue, but I do. I grew to care a lot about some of the writers who were burned by this company, and I've always been of the belief that when something's wrong, good people can fix it... I trusted that the only reason this company was still able to operate in such a shady manner was that people in authority just didn't know about it, or didn't understand. Unfortunately, I came to find out that it's more a matter of people in authority not caring very much. And I'll keep fighting to fix that. In the meantime...

Yes, I get a lot of backlash for it. Happy PA'ers have written to the media to try to discredit me, I've had a few situations that border on scary, and it seems to keep me on an emotional rollercoaster. I often think I need to step back from it, but -- the problem still isn't fixed! Hence,

my dilemma. \*

### **BIROL**

Jenna, we scheduled this chat for an hour, which is up, but I still have five questions on the table. Do you have time for a couple of more before you have to head out?

### **JENNA**

I can hang around until 10:30 for anyone who wants to stay. (Promised my bro I'd listen to him practice for a piano concert after the chat. 😊)

### **BIROL**

(That would be another 30 minutes for those not in the same time zone as Jenna.)

Okay then, next question up... 😊

### **KATIEMAC**

What do you feel is your greatest personal accomplishment to date? (as opposed to professional)

### **JENNA**

Beating agoraphobia. Hands down, toughest thing I've ever done, and never thought I'd get better. \*

### **WMYERS**

When is it appropriate to use a pen name?

### **JENNA**

Appropriate? Whenever you want. I know that people often use pen names if they write in very different genres (erotica and children's writing, for instance), but some people just prefer keeping their personal and professional lives separate, so they use a pen name all the time... I chose to keep my maiden name for my writing. \*

### **KTC**

Does your latest book uncover specific scams writers should be aware of? Also, if it does, if it uncovers any Canadian scams that freelancers should know about? Thanks.

### **JENNA**

Yes, and yes. I had to be careful about naming names in a few cases, but whenever I was allowed to, I did name names... I remember one Canadian company we talked about, but luckily, that company was forced out of business. The book does a combination-- it tells about types of writers' scams in general, then gives specific examples whenever possible. \*

### **ALPHABET**

Are you going to admit that in fact you are not actually one person, but really Jenna Glatzer stands for Jane, Emily, Nina, Nellie, Anna, Grace, Laura, Alice, Teresa, Zoe, Elaine and Rita ? After all, you've done more than most dozen I know!



**JENNA**

LOL Blame that on the agoraphobic years-- I had absolutely nothing else to do with my life, so I got a lot of writing done! 😊 \*

**BIROL**

One last question for you, Jenna, and then we can move onto the bonus round. 😊

**JENNA**

Ha!

**TIMANDRA**

Are you shocked by how we need others' approval?

**JENNA**

Not at all shocked, but yes, I'm super-aware of it. I think what surprises me more is that I'm \*not\* more worried about rejections than I am.. I'm worse about it in most other areas of my life, but somehow, I'm able to take the professional reactions to my writing less personally... however, reviews are another story. I live in fear of a reader feeling my book wasn't a worthy purchase. I think writers, in general, are sensitive, approval-craving people. That's why we need to learn to validate ourselves first, and look at outside validation as something nice, but optional. \*

**BIROL**

Jenna, I did just receive to last minute questions, but looking at the clock, why don't we ask the trivia question now and then, if it is not yet time for your brother's recital, we can get back to the questions or I can e-mail them to you to answer later on the board perhaps?

**JENNA**

Oh yeah! That's a good idea. I have about 15 minutes left; anything that comes in later, I'd be happy to answer on the board.

**BIROL**

Okay, everyone's typing fingers ready?

The "bonus round" I referred to is the trivia question. It will be asked by me and answered by the members of the audience. That's you. As previously mentioned, the winner will receive a copy of *The Street Smart Writer: Self-Defense Against Sharks and Scams in the Writing World*.

In order to answer the question, PM me. The first person to PM me with the correct answer wins. PMs sent to Jenna, MacAllister, or anyone else are invalid, even if they were the first correct answer. The correct answer must be PM'd to me.

(Sorry, supermods and admins are ineligible to win. Non-supermods (aren't all mods really super?), feel free to race for the correct answer.)

**JENNA**

(In the chat, not the forums PM function.)

**BIROL**

Yes. Thanks for that clarification. 😊

Okay. Everyone ready?

The question is:

What (US) holiday was Jenna born on?

**JENNA**

(Clue: answer's on my website)

**BIROL**

Okay. I've got a bunch of answers already.

The first responder was Richard. Let's see if he's got the right answer....

He says:

Thanksgiving.

**JENNA**

Yep! \*ding ding ding\* We have a winner. 😊

**BIROL**

(A lot of people seem to think you make a great Independence Day baby.)

Congratulations, Richard.

**JENNA**

LOL

**BIROL**

If you could provide me with your full contact information: AW ID (if available), legal name, and postal mailing address, I'll make certain you receive your prize! If you have a board ID PM me there or I can provide you with my e-mail address.

Jenna, it's been suggested I voice the room before you run out the door and honestly, I've got a mess of trivia answer windows to clean up....

**JENNA**

Good idea. Open the dams! 😊

[What followed was a brief, informal period which included thank yous from the attendees for Jenna's time and efforts.]

**[Special thanks to MacAllister for helping moderate the chat and working behind the scenes assisting late arrivals and those with technical difficulties and Pthom (Peter) for helping train the moderators before this evening's chat as well as assisting with technical difficulties as they arose.]**

*Please join us for our next scheduled chat on Friday, February 3rd when our guest speaker will be Victoria Strauss, noted fantasy author and Vice-Chair of SFWA's Committee on Writing Scams, better known as Writer Beware.*