

Media Tab Q & A

**A Conversation with Deborah McTiernan,  
author of  
*Lilly Noble & Actual Magic***

**I hear you have a unique revision and editing process.  
Would you please share that with us?**

Sure. After I've written the first draft of whatever I'm working on, I read and reread my manuscript over and over again, mostly forward, but sometimes backward. Each time through, I add a different layer to the story. Only light touches though, like expressions to the characters faces, little twists in the plot, stuff going on underneath a scene like weather or an argument in the background, and I hide the clues. Each time through, my word choices sharpen, character motives become clear, the plot twists and turns, the mood deepens, and dialogue improves. With the revisions, edits and rewrites of ***Lilly Noble & Actual Magic***, I read the manuscript 54 times before I was completely satisfied I had written the story exactly right for the imaginary reader I keep inside my head.

**Didn't you get bored with the story, you know, because you'd read it so many times?**

Not at all. In fact, the more I read it, the more I liked it.

About half way through the editing process with ***Lilly Noble & Actual Magic***, the story started taking a life of its own. I had a plan and an end result in mind, but as parts of the story emerged and grew and the characters began to change, I learned to adapt and be flexible. By surrendering to the process, I was able to let the story show me the way.

I knew my characters were exactly right when I fell in love with Lilly, her friends, and even Morgann. As the writing got easier and easier, and I knew I was finally moving in the right direction.

**How do you deal with writer's block?**

Excellent question. I rewrite the last few paragraphs of the scene where I left off from the day before. Doing this pulls me back into the story's rhythm and focus, and the writing flows.

**Is there a message in *Lilly Noble & Actual Magic* that you want your reader to grasp?**

Yes, absolutely! Thank you for asking that question. The message is; Believe in yourself. Ignore anyone who shames you or puts you down. If the thing you love doing brings you happiness and joy, keep doing it. And always protect your dreams.

**Do you recall how your interest in writing originated?**

I found a portable Smith-Corona typewriter in an old steamer trunk in my grandmother's attic when I was four. Clicking those keys with my fingers cast a spell over me. Stories began to unfold in my head. Playing with that typewriter and thinking about those stories made me really happy. I decided right then and there that I wanted to write stories that helped other people feel happy too.

**Do you see writing as a career?**

Absolutely. Right now I'm working on breaking into a very crowded market at a time when, thanks to the Internet, Amazon, and social media, an author has more control of how that career unfolds. It's a huge responsibility and takes a whole lot of work, but I'm having the time of my life, and I'm meeting some of the coolest people.

**I hear you say a prayer before you write. Would you be willing to share it with us?**

Sure. I say; Dear God, please help me write stories that give kids courage, confidence, and self-esteem, so they learn how to believe in themselves. I say that prayer with the hope that some day I write at least one sentence that gives someone and an unshakeable faith in who they are and what they are doing.

**What's your philosophy about your writing?**

My philosophy is really pretty basic. It's quality, not quantity that matters. Make a commitment to writing your very best work for your readers because they are worth your very best effort, and then hold yourself to that standard every single day. When you write, never be afraid to put truth on the page, because your deepest experiences with pain are where your greatest strengths are hidden. And know, what you truly believe and think about anything will always come through in your words.

I've learned to stop worrying about what people think and concentrate on writing the best stories I can.

**What are your 10 favorite books – and why?**

***Macbeth*** (William Shakespeare) - Shakespeare reveals in a subtle way, the lengths someone would go to trap another human being into doing their dirty work. Reading Shakespeare was how I learned to connect a character's actions, expressions, and behavior to their internal dialogue.

***The Screwtape Letters*** (C.S. Lewis) - The book is composed of correspondence between an Uncle Screwtape, a Master Tempter, and his Nephew Wormwood, a Tempter-In-Training. These two tempters go to great lengths in their unrelenting efforts to steal a human soul. I won't tell you how it ends.

***Alice in Wonderland*** (Lewis Carroll) - As a kid, I wanted to drop down that rabbit hole with Alice and meet the Mad Hatter, the Red Queen, and the Cheshire Cat.

***Peter Pan*** (JM Barrie) - Okay, seriously, who doesn't wish they knew how to fly. The world would be a much smaller place, and we wouldn't have to wait so long to visit the people we love who live so far away.

***The Harry Potter Series*** (JK Rowling) - Harry Potter taught us all the true meaning of love, courage, and friendship. Harry showed us how to be better people. JK Rowling is a brilliant story teller!

***The Twilight Series*** (Stephenie Meyer) - What's a love story without a vampire and a klutzy damsel in distress? From Ms Meyer's tale I learned a character's behavior is only as convincing to the reader as the character's reason for doing it. Who wouldn't want a doting vampire showing up on their bedroom window sill?

***To Kill a Mocking Bird*** (Harper Lee) - With its racial hypocrisy, prejudice, and violence, this story is as relevant today as it was in the decade this book was written. Big heroes can come in a very small and innocent packages.

***The Elements of Style*** (Strunk and White) - I've read this book probably a hundred times, and still refer to it whenever I edit. It's in my nightstand because I do most of my writing in bed.

***Cinderella*** (Charles Perrault) - A great romance. It has everything. An orphaned girl, a wicked stepmother, horrible stepsisters, a handsome prince, a fairy godmother, a kingdom, glass slippers, a ball gown, greed, revenge, hatred, social manipulation, and love. That kind of stuff is always a page turner.

**Anything written by Jack Canfield** - When I read his stuff the world just makes more sense. I'm able to find my feet and get a sense of direction.

**Everything by Jules Verne** - He was a true Science Fiction author. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, From the Earth to the Moon*, when I read his stuff as a kid I used to wonder if Mr. Verne was a time traveler.

**Pride & Prejudice** (Jane Austin) - When the subject is love, the obstacles always remain the same. Austin's attention detail with the outer expressions of the inner emotions between Elizabeth Barrett and Mister Darcy were absolutely perfect.

**Favorite music?**

Craig Chaquico, Yes, Supertramp, Def Leopard, REO Speedwagon, Jimmy Buffet, I love just about anything with a pulse.

**How can you tell when a book you are working on is finished?**

When I start cleaning out my desk, the closets, the drawers, and my refrigerator, I know my current story project is coming to a close.

**What's the most surprising thing you've figured out about life?**

Fear is our worst enemy. If you allow it, fear will stop you dead in your tracks. I allowed it to hold me in place for a very long time. Then way day I had a sort of epiphany. I figured out the best way to cast fear aside is to remember everyone else experiences those very same fears. Striving for perfection will break your heart and ruin your soul, and it's just plain stupid. As long as I know I've given something my very best effort, I'm happy

with the result even if it flops, because I learned something important in the process.

**What advice would you want to give to unpublished authors?**

Learn to stop worrying about what people think of you and what you write, and just focus on whatever you are writing.

Have a plan, and know that everything about that plan is going to change. But by starting with a plan and having an end result of what you to accomplish in mind, you begin the work of writing your story with a road map.

As you move deeper into the story you are writing, learn to be flexible. Be willing to adapt. Be willing to change direction, and give yourself permission to change your mind about things. This also applies to your personal growth as well.

When you feel afraid just know everyone else shares those same fears. Use those fears to increase the tension and emotion in your story.

Accept the fact that you will make mistakes. You can make a huge mess and still recover. Absolutely everything is recoverable.

Learn only to be embarrassed about the stuff worth getting embarrassed about.

Surround yourself with people who are on your side, positive people who want to see you succeed. Be around people who are generally happy for you. Be a good person to others and help others out. They will be there to help you out when it's your turn. And always, always come from a place of giving, not getting.

And more important than anything else I've said so far; care enough about what you're doing to make it the very best you can.

**What made you decide to go the self-publishing route?**

After 13 manuscripts and 4 screenplays, though nothing had sold, I figured out who I was, what I was doing, why I was doing it, and who I was doing it for. With the advent of the InterNet and Amazon, people who love to write have an affordable opportunity to get their work in print.

All this time I've kept the faith that what I was writing would find an audience and my audience would find me. And you know what? That's exactly what is happening!

It's a lot of work. But, when you love what you're doing, continuing with the process is easy and fun.