

The Path To Publishing

By Francesca G. Varela

I decided what I would do with my life on a fall afternoon thirteen years ago. I was slouched over the thin plastic desk of my third-grade classroom, my hand tight from grasping my pencil. Behind the single sheet of paper provided for the assignment I had stapled four more; there was just too much to write about. In large, slanted handwriting I created a story of spaceships, of mysterious giant bouncy balls, of herds of intelligent space goats, of a fruity drink called Moonrock Rumble. When I had finished I proudly drew crayon illustrations and glued it to my research poster on the planet Neptune. That was the day I realized how fun writing stories was, and how organically they came from me. That was the day I decided to become an author.

There was no reason to wait. From that point on I regularly wrote short stories ranging from fairytales to random nonsensical ramblings. I wrote in diaries and journals, and I started many uncompleted novels. By my Junior year of high school I had finally finished one. It was a realistic fiction novel called *Autumn*.

I googled “how to get a book published”. It seemed the process began with query letters: send them out to literary agents, who will hopefully request the manuscript—and hopefully *accept* it. Then they work their magic by contacting publishing companies and securing you a contract. So I sent query letters to about five literary agents. When they all turned me down, I wasn’t surprised. That’s how the industry works, right?

Nonetheless, I was ready to move on. After I graduated high school in 2011, I decided to write something new. An idea had been culminating in my mind for the past year or so, and it was finally time to write it out. Six months later I had finished writing *Call of the Sun Child*. I let my mom read it, but otherwise it was unseen and unedited before I sent out query letters. This time I queried small, independently owned publishing companies along with literary agents. Unlike larger companies, small presses often publish new writers, even if they aren’t represented by an agent.

The responses were promising. Besides the ten or so expected *no*’s, two literary agents and two small presses requested the full manuscript. I was both thrilled and terrified. The months of waiting to hear back from them was torture, and so too were the responses. To be so close and then turned down was much worse than an outright denial; especially when I knew that it was my *writing*, my characters, my whole *being* that they were rejecting, and not just the superficialities of a query letter.

Just the day before Homebound Publications offered me a contract I had been turned down by the other small press. I was sure Homebound would likewise reject my book; I was ready to give up. But then I screamed and cried and jumped through the hallways, slapping my hand against the wall. Because, on a fall day a year and a half ago, I heard what I had been waiting for since third-grade—that I going to be published. That I was, officially and for all time, an author.