



# Now or Never

You can be a published children's writer—with the right attitude and a bulldog mentality.

BY KIMBERLY EDWINA CAMPBELL

What in the name of Elvis and Georgia peanuts made me think I could ever be a real writer? Looking back, I still can't answer that question with clarity. When I started writing children's stories for more than a hobby, I thought selling my work would be a snap. Boy, was I in a fog. After receiving several form rejection letters from editors, I came to a crossroads: Quit this foolish literary journey or light a bonfire under it. I chose the latter.

For the next two years, I wrote almost every day, churning out stories like a furious hamster on an exercise wheel. I sold my first children's story, "Finders Keepers," in 2004 to *Shine Brightly* magazine. Acceptance to publication was a three-month wait—unusually fast for the publishing business.


Upon receiving the magazine, my first reaction was jubilation. Oh, how I'd waited for this day! I could've fallen to my knees. I could've kissed the mailman. Instead, I admired the full-color, glossy paper and vibrant illustrations. I read other stories in the issue and felt like I'd received a warm-and-fuzzy welcome into the Published Writers Club of America. It was a magic moment for sure.

"Wow!" I gushed to my husband, who certainly was in awe of my giddiness and rather relieved that my late-night writing sessions and \$2,000-plus spending spree (toward writing conferences, instruction manuals, newsletters, membership fees and magazine subscriptions) had at last yielded income. The reality is, the payment for the story was barely enough to buy a hamburger and fill up my car with a tank of gas. Nevertheless, we toasted my authorial debut.

After this small (but important) milestone, I enjoyed a boost of confidence. It felt great to say, "I'm published." Still, I knew not to get overly optimistic—most seasoned authors admit that the road to success is usually dark, murky and paved with rejection. Fortunately, these folks also say, "Don't give up."

Lucky for me, giving up isn't an option. When I set my mind to something, it's a dogfight. This mentality helped greatly as I battled my way toward publication. In an attempt to stack the odds in my favor, I familiarized myself with the tricks of the trade. I joined a talented critique group, and the feedback strengthened my manuscripts. I bought *Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market* book to help target my submissions, joined the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators and began attending writing conferences.

Since tackling that first sale, I've sold my work to *Pockets*, *On the Line*, *Kid Zone*, *Cadet Quest* and Blooming Tree Press. Most recently, I sent a proposal to Enslow, an educational publisher, which resulted in my first nonfiction book contract.

Elvis had it right when he sang, "It's now or never." It's that sense of immediacy that keeps me focused on improving my writing skills, getting my stories into the hands of editors and has my fingers regularly tapping away on the keyboard. 

KIMBERLY EDWINA CAMPBELL. (luckypenny.net) lives in Newnan, Ga. In 2004, she won first place in the children's fiction category of the 73rd Annual *Writer's Digest* Writing Competition. She's a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, and her first book, a biography of Newbery author Richard Peck, will be published by Enslow in 2007.