

Lisa Saunders

## How Children and Adults Can Get Published

**1. Build your portfolio:** The easiest way to get your thoughts into print and begin gathering "your" audience, is to submit letters to the editor (don't forget to include your hometown when you do) and to submit stories to those free weekly newspapers and monthly magazines you see lying around. They are short staffed and welcome free stories with a good photo or illustration (only send images that won't violate anyone's copyright).

**2. Call local editors directly, offering a story for free:** I finally began earning money as a freelance writer when I called a Rockland County magazine offering them a story I did on a friend in the area who beat the Guinness World Record time for paddling down the Mississippi River. The editor replied, "That sounds very interesting, but we have a limited budget and won't be able to pay you." I assured him that was fine. I just needed to get my foot in the door. Later, that magazine offered me the chance to write the feature story, "The 7 Wonders of Rockland," for which I was paid. When a developer read it, they contacted me with the offer to write even higher paid articles about the towns where they were building. Although the magazine and developer were paying me to write on a specific topic, I was still able to share my personal insights and "voice" within.

**3. Contact editors by name at national magazines:** It's almost pointless to send a query letter to an editor without addressing it directly to them. You can find an editor's name by flipping through the pages of the big general books such as, "Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market"; "The Young Writers Guide to Getting Published" by Kathy Henderson, the "Writer's Market" and "Literary Market Place," which are probably available at your library or local bookstore. I've always found the updated contact information by sitting on the floor of bookstores and libraries and skimming through magazines looking for the current editors, or I call publishers to find out who the submissions editor is. Read children magazines such as "Skipping Stone," "Stone Soup" or "Cicada" to see what other published children are writing.

**4. Write a query letter that grabs an editor's interest right away:** The next step is the query letter, which introduces you and your work to a publisher. I've had the most luck when I simply jump right into my story, hoping to catch their interest in the first sentence. For example, this query letter landed me a publisher for my memoir, *Anything But a Dog!*, it began: "Inevitably, most kids ask for a dog. And who can blame them? Dogs like Lassie adore you, keep you warm when you're caught in a blizzard and drag you out of burning buildings when you're unconscious. But by the time we're adults, we've learned the truth: dogs urinate on your new wall-to-wall carpets; dig holes in your leather recliners to hide their rawhide bones, and bite your neighbor's kid. So when my seven-year-old daughter Jackie asked for a dog, I said no. Our younger daughter Elizabeth was disabled and wouldn't be able to protect herself from a frisky animal. But I did make Jackie a promise: 'If God brings a dog to our doorstep, you can have it.' In the meantime, I offered her a hamster..."

**5. Learn how to use a digital camera:** Magazines and newspapers need images to make their pages come alive--and many have had to lay off their photographers. Offer to provide images with your story, and if that's not possible, suggest images they might want to consider. In my historical story, "The Hanging of Henry Gale," I wrote to the magazine: "After reading the article about the Revolutionary War in your June issue, I thought you'd be interested in my story, 'The Hanging of Henry Gale.' My ancestor Henry Gale was a captain in the war who later became a leader in Shays' Rebellion. He was found guilty of treason and sentenced to hang. I can submit a photo of his headstone and suggest an illustration of Shays' Rebellion from the New York Public Library image database."

**6. Get out from behind your computer and meet writers and editors:** Join writer's groups or form your own.

**7. Give readers what they want--but stay true to your voice (or your soul):** When you write, write from your heart--share your soul. Don't write what everyone else is writing. When you share what you are really thinking, your readers may just find a kindred spirit in you. Try to write every day, such as letters to your family and friends, or in a journal.

**(If you would like to have your story published in a book of short stories by other young writers, have your parent contact Lisa Saunders at [saundersbooks@aol.com](mailto:saundersbooks@aol.com) for more details.)**