

How to be Unapologetically Unpublished

Dara Girard

Valentine's Day always gets me thinking about being single. How can I help it? I'm bombarded with articles on "How to Be Single on Valentine's Day", or "Ten Things to Do If You're Single on Valentine's Day", or my personal favorite "Don't Feel Like a Depressed Loser Because No One Sent You Flowers on Valentine's Day". Okay, so the last one I made up, but you get the point. All this unnecessary advice is given as though being single were some sort of disease that needed to be cured or at least effectively treated.

I found this attitude given to singles similar to those given to unpublished writers. To many people, being unpublished is a shameful state. People refer to the efforts of the unpublished as 'hobbies', and they are spoken about in hushed tones of sympathy. Unpublished authors should be proud of the courage they have to follow a dream. They should declare themselves writers without waiting for someone else to tell them they are. I implore the unpublished—both newbie and advanced—to stand tall among the onslaught of rejections, harsh critiques, and well-meaning (but sometimes strange) advice of the published. So, here are seven ways to be unapologetically unpublished.

1. Remember that you don't need to be published to consider yourself a writer. The act of writing makes you a writer. It's that simple. You don't need a partner to be a whole person.
2. Don't be ashamed of your status. Being unpublished doesn't mean you're stupid, lazy, uncreative, or crazy. It just means you're unpublished—for now. Those currently published were once where you are. Published writers aren't necessarily better than you; they just found the right fit at the right time. A married or coupled person isn't better than a single person.
3. Know that being published won't make you happy. Okay, perhaps for a couple of days or even months, but that's about it. If your marriage is lousy, your job sucks, you hate your neighbors, or your hairline is receding and your thighs aren't, publishing won't change that. Make your life fun now. Don't wait for life to change for you. Don't sit around waiting for someone to make you happy; they can't.
4. Understand that being unpublished isn't a state of unworthiness. It's just a phase. Being single doesn't mean that nobody wants you. It just means that you haven't found your right match yet.
5. Enjoy the freedom of being unpublished. As an unpublished person, you can write what you want, when you want. You don't have deadlines to consider or an editor who tells you to get rid of a beloved character, or a reviewer who is upset that you've changed your style. There is an undeniable pleasure in writing something that is completely yours. Something that doesn't answer to anyone. As a single person, you can do whatever you want and not have to worry about that blasted 'C' word: compromise.
6. Remember that 'published' or 'unpublished' is a transient state. Not all people who have been published stay published; their books go out of print and they have to hit the pavement again. Those people in that lovely place called coupledness don't always stay there.
7. Lastly, don't be desperate. This is a hard one, I know. Being published has a mystique I can't eradicate and wouldn't want to. Dreams are precious things. I won't deny that being published is fun, but it's not the end all. Don't sign any contract offered just because it means publication. Dating a guy or girl with the IQ of a slug and the manners of a second grader to end your dry spell is a definite 'no, no'. You will regret it. Focus on the work; polish it then make sure to find the place that will appreciate it.

In essence, realize that you're enough just the way you are. Wonderful, intelligent, and embarking on a journey that takes gumption, risk, and imagination. You're a writer. To me, that's pretty cool.

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