

The following information and interview will be included in a book to be published by Kaplan in 2009. The book will focus on career choices for teens.

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1. What criteria did you use when deciding which colleges to apply to?

The most number of classes offering Pass/Fail options. No, seriously, looking back, more than locale or size, I seemed to recognize the importance society places on NAME (recognition) value. Rather than going to Los Angeles to study acting, I went to, and graduated from, the University of California, Berkeley, based largely upon its overall reputation of academic excellence.

2. What was your first choice school?

Actually, my first choice (way back) was University of Nevada, Las Vegas, when I was interested in Hotel Administration. Oops, I spent too much time being the new kid in town though that I was placed on probation and later suspended. A learning experience, for sure. No regrets. This allowed me to take a good, hard look at myself. This led me to discover where, and what, I really wanted to be...when I grow up.

3. *What career did you have in mind when you applied to college?*

Hotel Administration (UNLV); Acting (UC Berkeley); I was already a writer by the time I pursued my master's in marketing (Golden Gate University).

4. *How did the school you attended impact your career choice and opportunities?*

UNLV and UC Berkeley were too early on to influence what I'd end up doing later. But, my time spent at Golden Gate University was probably the most valuable time I've ever invested in my career. My education there allowed me to take responsibility for myself, not to be dependent on what the traditional publishing world dictates. It also taught me to take risks, try new markets with my writing. What I'd learned about (international) business/marketing, prompted me to become a European citizen and market my books there (almost exclusively).

5. *Do you now wish you had attended a different school? Which one and why?*

Not different. But, had I known I was to become a writer, I would have wanted to study the craft more. Writing is a skill, and can always be improved upon. Without question, San Francisco State University has an excellent Creative Writing program (undergrad. and grad.). I learned much from the few classes I had taken there; I would have learned a whole lot more, been much better prepared, had I been involved in their curriculum full-time.

6. *Which college or colleges are turning out the leaders in your profession today?*

For Journalism, Stanford. Again, credentials mean a lot. For fiction writers, many master's program-graduates (Creative Writing) seem to consistently capture the attention of acquisitions editors here and abroad.

7. *Please describe the "Aha!" moment when you realized what you wanted to do.*

I never wanted to be a writer. My "Aha!" moment came after I realized that I needed to tell a story. I felt this particular story was beyond dynamic. But I wasn't a writer, I didn't like writing...I looked for someone else to write this story. Then, "Aha!" I knew that if I wanted to have this story told, I'd have to tell it myself. That's when I became a writer; when I NEEDED to, not wanted to.

8. *Did you change your major? If so, why?*

Absolutely.

Please list your majors: Hotel Administration (very short-lived); Drama; Marketing.

9. *Which classes were most valuable in preparing you for your career or in helping you decide on your career?*

For me in particular: International Marketing; Advanced Issues in E-Commerce; Consumer Behavior, Integrated Marketing Communications and Marketing Research (Golden Gate University) and Introduction to Creative Writing; Journal Writing (San Francisco State University).

10. *How did your professors impact your career choice or preparation?*

This was nearly an “Aha!” moment, I’ll never forget it. The instructor of my first writing course, Myrna Elena Hughes, began her class by saying, “Everything you write in here is RIGHT.” Creative Writing is NOT English class, no rules exist...you’re the creator. I loved this. Not having to worry about spelling, grammar, structure and conjugation gave me freedom. This made me WANT to continue.

11. *Did you have a job and/or internship during college that influenced your career choice or career preparation in any way?*

Yes, I was a writer whose books weren’t selling. This motivated me to obtain my master’s in marketing (to market, promote and sell my books). Going hungry, starving and losing all self-respect influenced me enough to ‘get a life,’ become better educated and take full responsibility for my writing career.

12. *Do you have an advanced degree? Is one helpful/required in your field?*

Yes, Marketing (mentioned many times earlier). Helpful, definitely. Required, no. For me, helpful AND required. If you choose to write about something that’s rather new, different or unconventional, be prepared to do it ALL on your own. When I began meeting literary agents, their first question to me was the same, “What is your book most similar to that’s already out there?” I have written and published four middle-grade/teen novels about ‘creating futures without fear.’ No one else, that I’m aware of, is doing this. Thus, I’m on my own. Earning my master’s in marketing helped me create my own publishing destiny.

13. What do you love most about your job?

That I depend on no one else for any successes I may achieve, for any failures I may endure.

14. What is the most difficult or challenging aspect of your job?

Getting people to know about my books.

15. What is the biggest misconception people have about what you do?

That writer's only write. Writing, editing and revising accounts for about 5% of what I do as a writer.

16. What was the biggest obstacle you faced in getting to where you are in your career? How did you overcome it?

I WAITED for someone else to tell me that I, my books, my writing was good enough. B-I-G M-I-S-T-A-K-E; I was my own obstacle. I had a colossal misconception about the way publishing works and I listened to the wrong people. I spent nearly twelve years having been rejected by literally thousands of literary agents, editors, traditional publishers. I overcame by doing it ALL myself; I'm now proud of my accomplishments, and more than that, my unwillingness to give up.

17. What skills are an absolute must for someone interested in pursuing your career?

Whether you're a journalist/non-fiction writer or novelist, you MUST know how to market, promote and sell what you've written. Having your writing DISCOVERED (by someone else) is a fallacy. Some people are innate marketers, while some, like myself, need to keep learning how to do it (better). You must also write well. If you're not confident about your writing, join a Writer's Group, hire an editor, keep taking classes. Don't ever depend on 'getting published' to make you feel confident.

18. Whom do you admire most in your industry/field? Why?

Standing above many, in my opinion, are: Alice Walker, Paulo Coelho, Markus Zusak, Gary Paulsen and Philip Pullman.

Any writer that writes from their heart, writes for themselves, has my sincere respect and admiration. I

feel, others readers also recognize this sincerity and hopefully appreciate it. There's nothing to be admired in formulaic, copycat or trendy 'genre du jour' writing.

19. What is one piece of advice you would give to someone who is interested in pursuing your career?

Easy question. If you feel a NEED to tell a story, you'll be writing forever. If you're pursuing writing because you want to see your words in print, you want people to read what you've written, or you want to be on *Oprah*, choose a different career. In my opinion, you'll never feel fully satisfied, if you don't feel a compelling NEED to tell. Or is it 'need to show?' Show DON'T tell. You'll learn this in Creative Writing 101.

20. If you could do everything all over again, what would you do differently?

(When I was starting out) Think of my writing first, rather than what I feel my writing (career) is going to do for me.

21. Please add any additional comments you think might be helpful to someone hoping to pursue your career:

1. A synonym for the word 'novel' in any dictionary is 'new.' Please tell, I mean, show this to any literary agent that may end up asking you that question, "What is your work most similar to that's already out there?"
2. A person unafraid can accomplish anything; doubts destroy the destinies we create for ourselves.
3. Always believe...no matter what; the perfect feeling, the perfect test, is believing, when no one else does.
