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Giving Birth To A Book

Terrifying And Fulfilling, Just Like Having A Baby

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Giving Birth To A Book



Have you ever had that dream where you're naked in front of people? People who are judging you and maybe even laughing at you? You run and try to find something to shield your intimate parts—an umbrella, a watermelon, a baby wipe—but alas, there is nothing. This is kind of what it feels like to release your first novel into the world.

I started writing my book, *Girl in Shades*, in 2004—the year before my first child was born. I wrote the manuscript during the weekends when I wasn't at work. When my son arrived, my novel was my way to escape the monotony of being home full time with my screaming, puking, little angel. I didn't talk about my writing ^[1] to anyone. I wanted to keep the whole experience as pure and untainted as possible.

Flash forward to 2011—I had two little kids and *Girl in Shades* was about to be published by ECW Press. This was what I had worked for, what I had waited for. As I learned, however, publishing your first novel is a lot like having your first baby—everyone talks about how wonderful it will be and how much you will love it, and when

the difficult bits happen (like the part where you stay up all night, or worry constantly, or isolate yourself completely), you are totally overwhelmed by it all.

The story I wrote, quite secretly, about a girl coming to terms with the loss of her mother, was now available for anyone in the world to read and comment on. Those intimate little words I crafted in my house, alone, were now quite public. The concept of this—even though it's what I dreamed of—was terrifying, mostly because I had no idea if people would like it (and, of course, we all prefer to be liked, no?) and at that point, I had no insight into the fact that no one piece of writing could possibly appeal to every person.

I remember the first time that Google Alerts told me someone had written something about my book. My Blackberry “dinged” and I quickly read the blog post, only to learn that although the woman enjoyed the story, she thought that one part of the plot might not have been necessary. I was horrified. Why was this stranger telling me how my story should have gone? How on earth could she even know, when I was the one who wrote the book?

This is when I took a few deep breaths and realized two important things: one, I needed to shut off my Google Alerts, and two, if I was ever going to make it through this, I had to find a way to embrace the sometimes challenging process of public opinion. So, instead of worrying about what other people loved or didn't love about *Girl in Shades*, I just kept repeating to myself, “If I can just get through these uncomfortable feelings, I can continue to do what I love most: write.”

When we have our first baby, we don't stop when things get hard—we learn, we adjust [2], and we take as much joy from the good moments as we can. I've done the same with my writing. It's been almost a year-and-a-half since my baby, I mean book, was born. I've heard many wonderful things about it from many wonderful people. And like faded memories of a painful labour, I've chosen to forget the hard parts. I was even prepared to do it all over again—my second book, *In The Body*, was released this past Fall. And, yes, by then I had made sure to practice my deep breathing.

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