

The Elder Rage Success Saga

By Jacqueline Marcell

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When I recently wrote my first book *Elder Rage or Take My Father... Please! How To Survive Caring For Aging Parents*, I didn't have a clue about publishing. I had just barely lived through an incredible year with my elderly parents and solved the gargantuan problem of getting my extremely difficult father to accept help. Once I turned my parents' lives around (at 81 and 87 with the onset of dementia), I felt beyond passionate that I had to get the word out to others about how to manage their elderly loved ones.

I had never written much beyond a postcard, and didn't have a degree in any aspect of medicine, but I was sure I'd find a publisher for my "Elder War & Peace" masterwork right away. What I did have was many years as a sales and marketing television executive, university level teaching experience, and lots of persistence and naïve chutzpa.

By looking through Literary Market Place and Writer's Market and researching the Health/Aging sections of bookstores, I located 130 publishers that had released something about eldercare. I called them all up and left a riveting Voice-Mail pitch. Sixty responded with "Yes, send it right away." (Even without an agent!)

I happily sent off my manuscript and then... unhappily received 57 glowing-with-praise rejection notices. A typical response was "Very well written, but does anyone want to read about it?" But then... finally, three offers! I was thrilled out of my mind... until I got the contracts. As a new, unknown author, I was offered a few hundred dollars up front, a very minimal royalty, a requirement to publish my next book with them, and a clause that give them some rights to the movie if it were ever made. I tried to negotiate; they thought for sure I'd cave in. Finally I said, "Uh, no thanks. I'll do it myself."

A good way get taken seriously

I pored over several books on self-publishing, took some classes, networked like crazy with self-published authors, and decided that since I was unknown, the only way my book would be taken seriously would be to have numerous celebrity endorsements. I realized that I had really hit a chord with my topic because nine months later I was on Cloud Nine with impressive quotes from Steve Allen, Ed Asner, Jacqueline Bisset, Dr. Harold H. Bloomfield, John Bradshaw, Pam Dawber, Fred de Cordova, Phyllis Diller, Hugh Downs, Duke University's Center for Aging, Jerry Dunphy, Ken Dychtwald, Dr. Dean Edell, Betty Friedan, Leeza Gibbons, Dr. John Gray, Mark Victor Hansen, Julie Harris, Senator Tom Hayden, The Institute for Successful Aging, Johns Hopkins Memory Clinic, Dr. Irene C. Kassorla, Janet Leigh, Art Linkletter, Ed McMahon, Hayley Mills, Regis Philbin, Jane Powell, Senator John D. Rockefeller IV, Dr. Bernie S. Siegel, Dr.

Nancy L. Snyderman of ABC News, Robert Stack, Dr. Eric Tangalos of the Mayo Clinic, and Dr. Rudy Tanzi of Harvard Medical School... but I really don't like to name-drop.

Locating all these people was no small feat. I put together a cover letter as riveting as my Voice-Mail message, along with my bio, a "can't-put-it-down" synopsis, and sample quotes showing what I was looking for-and then I faxed, e-mailed, or mailed hundreds of agents, managers, and PR people. When I'd call to follow up, it was so upsetting to hear: "Sorry, we didn't get it, please resend it," or "That person doesn't work here anymore," or "You need to talk to their manager, not us," or "No, we don't handle that, you need to talk to the publicist," or "Didn't anyone tell you he never endorses books?" or "We get hundreds of these requests a month. I'm sure she'd have no interest in a book like that." Believe me, it was NEVER bada-boom-bada-bing.

Polite persistence turned out to be the key. I'd re-send packages, re-leave messages, re-email notes, and re-fax information, until my name became pretty well known. "Hi, just me, Jacqueline Marcell-again." Eventually I got their attention. Those who were interested in the topic asked to see a galley and then I'd wait... wait... wait... for them to have the time to read it, evaluate and respond. I worked on one celebrity's endorsement for seven months; his assistant told me, "He said that if you called one more time, he'd give it to you just because of your very pleasant persistence!" Yes, I was always polite; OK, I begged a little, but I was careful never to be obnoxious or annoying (I hope!).

Then I was elated when the quotes started to come in. Did you hear me screaming when I got Hugh Downs? One celebrity called and said he loved it but was ill; he asked if I'd mind taking his quote verbally. Uh... not at all! I was surprised that celebrities are more willing to help than I would have thought, but then I realized-they hadn't always been celebrities and other people surely helped them along the way too. When they see something worthy of their name and help, many are willing to lend a hand.

Then I got my first big break. Six months of calling paid off when I was asked to replace an ailing Maureen Reagan at The Governor's Conference for Women, presenting a caregiving seminar with California First Lady Sharon Davis. After that, by making 40 to 50 phone calls a day, I started to hit with interviews on numerous radio and television shows including CNN and NBC. I even got two hours in studio with someone I have admired for years-Dr. Toni Grant.

Then I turned fif... fif... (can't even write it) FIFTY, and reluctantly sent in my \$10 bucks to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Soon after, I got their nice Bulletin magazine in the mail and thought I should tell them about my book. I called the Editor in Chief, left my pitch, and within the hour, he called back. "I'm on your Web site; looks like an important subject. Overnight two copies of your book." Okey-dokey! Three days later... "We're flying in a reporter to do a story on you from Washington." The next thing I know, I'm the cover story with a four-page article with four photos, and my sales go through the roof because I'm delivered to 22 million households!

Then I made the biggest mistake ever by going to a second edition and a new ISBN simply to get a 2001 publication date just as the AARP Bulletin hit. You'd think I was the first publisher to ever do that in history. HUNDREDS of phone calls, e-mails, and faxes from booksellers all over the country because Ingram told them my book was "out of print" for weeks and didn't reference them to the new ISBN! Next book: *Writer's Rage*!

But it has all finally worked out, and I believe that because of all the endorsements and the chapter I include by a renowned dementia specialist, I'm being taken seriously much sooner than I would have been otherwise. The word-of-mouth following the AARP coverage has made *Elder Rage* THE book supplying the caregiving answers and support that frustrated adult children are searching for. And because it is written with so much humor, a very tough subject has been made palatable for the first time.

I am now a sought-after speaker at conventions and on radio and television, being an advocate for eldercare awareness and reform. I always have to laugh because the very first question an interviewer asks is "How in the world did you get all these incredible endorsements?" I smile and say, "I hit a chord with an issue they care about, with a book they know will help millions... and then I begged just a little-ever so politely."

Jacqueline Marcell has been a professional photographer and cinematographer, a college professor, and a sales & marketing television executive. After her amazing caregiving experience, Marcell dedicated her life to being an advocate for eldercare awareness and reform. Her book is Elder Rage; for further information on the book, including ordering details, visit Marcell's Web site at <http://www.elderrage.com/>.

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