

Heather Grace

**FREELANCE
WRITER-PHOTOGRAPHER**

*Graduate Diploma in Journalism, Concordia 1996
BAH Canadian Studies, Queen's 1995*

In her own words: "Every great success story starts with a dreamer who never said 'never.'"

When she was 16 years old, Heather Grace did precisely what anyone seeking a career in journalism should do — she went looking for advice from an expert.

"There was an *Ottawa Citizen* writer named Randall Denley whose column I admired. I wrote to him looking for answers to my questions about journalism. What's the job like? What does it entail? Where should I study to become a journalist? He answered with a fabulous letter, suggesting I get a broad education and to learn about the world first — to discover something to write about — before specializing in journalism. Very solid advice."

No kidding. Now a Montreal-based, freelance writer-photographer with by-lines in *Reader's Digest*, *Harrowsmith Country Life*, *Equinox*, *Queen's Alumni Review* and *The National Post*, Heather has parlayed a Queen's degree in Canadian Studies into a full-time writing career that includes magazine

journalism, childrens literature, translation and web content writing.

"It's a great life. I don't have to take a job if don't want to. I pick and choose everything I do. It's like the best smorgasbord I've ever been to!"

She caught the writing bug early, publishing her first poem at the age of 5 in a school newsletter. As a teenager, she covered the high school beat for both the school newspaper and the local paper, *The Kanata Kourier*. Then, with Randall Denley's words echoing in her

mind, she elected to take a Queen's degree in Canadian Studies.

"The freelancer in me showed up there! I was certain I would

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become either a broadcast or print journalist, so I needed to learn about Canadian history and sociology. I needed to know about the country I would be writing about. I also wanted to improve my French. I doubt I'd be doing so well in Montreal if I didn't have four years of French essays and presentations under my belt."

At Queen's, Heather lost no time throwing her energies into the campus media. She reported front-page news for

The Journal, tackled on-air stints for radio station CFRC and Studio Q, and wrote for literary journals and the Queen's yearbook. Her decision to write was solidified even further after a chance encounter with someone who had been comforted by one of her poems. "I remember feeling, 'This is it. I can make a difference in people's lives. This is what I have to do. I can't give up.'"

After graduating, she spent a year doing a Graduate Diploma in Journalism at Concordia to learn the "tricks of the trade from real journalists," including how to survive in the deadline-driven world of print journalism.

The degree helped land her a job as chief reporter for a Montreal weekly and then, just six months later, as associate editor for four sister magazines — *Equinox*, *Harrowsmith Country Life*, *Canadian Wildlife* and *Wild!*. "Working for the magazines gave me the confidence to start my own business. I learned how to pitch a story and what magazine editors look for in an article. I also honed my writing and editing skills under the direction of some very talented editors."

At the same time, Heather began working as a regular correspondent and columnist for *the Queen's Alumni Review*, a gig that she continues to this day. "I love being able to give something back to Queen's."

Within three years, she had the confidence and contacts to fly solo. A month after hanging out her freelancer's shingle (Graceful Publications), Heather had a story accepted by *Reader's Digest*. To this day, she continues to pitch full-length magazine features, photo essays and children's books. "I try not to let a

week go by without sending out at least one magazine query."

In March 1999, she signed on as a freelance editor with EMC Career Editions, a Montreal-based career guidebook publisher. It was a dream job. She could come and go as she pleased as long as she met EMC deadlines. "It was steady money but nothing full-time to tie me down. If I wanted to take off for two weeks to follow a story, I could."



flash!

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She continues to work for EMC, now known as the Ma Carriere Research Group since it was bought by the online job search giant Jobboom.com. Along with writing, editing and translating for the company's various magazines and web site, she oversees its only out-of-province venture, an annual magazine aimed at helping Ontario law school students better plan their careers. "It feels good to be working for a company that's making a small difference in young people's lives."

Graceful Publications, meanwhile, is faring well. Just recently, Heather realized a long-time dream when she scored a contract to publish an anthology of kids' poetry. It was the happy end to a frustrating search for a publisher. She sent more than 40 manuscripts to publishers across North America before hitting on Electric E Books Publishing, thanks to a lead from the Periodical Writers Association of Canada (PWAC). Such perseverance, she says, is the lot of any committed freelancer.

“Freelancers who are serious about making money can definitely do so. They just have to be disciplined, organized and good at marketing themselves through word of mouth, networking and participating in writers' organizations such as the Periodical

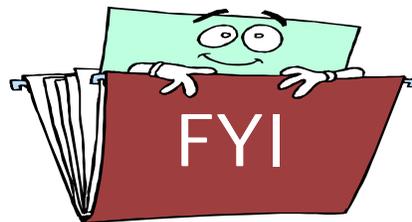
Writers Association of Canada, which is like a big, supportive writing family.

“I wouldn't suggest trying to launch a freelance career while working in an accounting firm, bank or restaurant — anything that will make you stray from the goal of getting published. Part-time jobs, too, take up great chunks of writing time. But if you can find

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something in communications or marketing, then you can pick up tips for your own business.”

“What I love most about my work is that I can take a fork in the road if I see one. That's what happened with the kids' poetry book. It's really a blessing to be able to do what I love to do all day. We have to create the right jobs for ourselves — and mine's tailor-made!” ❖



According to Heather, getting accurate information from people who actually do the work is critical.

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