

# *From Television Writing to Novel Writing*

Anytime you share your creative endeavors with people, you open yourself up to being judged. As a writer, when I expose my words to the public eye, I'm vulnerable to other people's opinions, which can be scary and exciting at the same time. When I was younger, I was never the class clown, or quick with a comeback, but everything I wrote in the past, whether it was a letter home from camp, or a short story, always contained humor, which is why the first writing job I got was on a television comedy.

I was excited when I got my first script on the sitcom *Major Dad*. I couldn't believe I was finally going to hear real actors saying my lines. During my time on the battlefield—and it was a battlefield—I learned a lot about television comedies. I learned how they were directed, edited, cast, and even how the wardrobe choices could help create the mood of the show. I also learned how to write voices of characters that were created by other people and portrayed by actors.

## *A New Challenge*

After working in television for a while, I wanted to try something new

and thought writing a novel would be a new challenge. I knew it was going to be different from writing television, I just didn't realize how different. In length alone, a sitcom script is forty-something double-spaced pages, and a novel is three hundred or more.

In television, you pitch out a story with the staff of writers on the show, then you go off and write the script, and then it's rewritten by you and those same writers. When you're having a bad day because you find out the cookie you're eating was meant for the dog, or you're stuck on a joke, you have other people to go to for help.

But when you write a novel, you're responsible for the entire story from beginning to end and if the witty banter isn't funny, you're the only one to blame. You can still share ideas with a friend or another writer, and they might give you good feedback, but only you know the story you're telling and only you know your characters intimately.

### *The Upside of Writing a Novel*

The upside of writing a novel is that I have total control. I can make the characters I created say or do anything I want. Unlike in my sitcom career, where some actors would not only rewrite their lines, but also the lines of the other actors, the characters in my book would never give me line revisions or talk back. And I never have to

worry that they're going to tweet offensive things, or go to rehab, or go through a public divorce that causes them to tweet offensive things then go to rehab. I can even put real people in my novel if I choose to, or dead ones, but in television the dead ones don't always show up to rehearse.

I once wrote an episode of a show featuring a famous actor. Unfortunately, this actor never memorized the script, he paraphrased everything, including jokes. Jokes can never be paraphrased. In comedy every word and the order they're in is for a reason, which is why your grandfather doesn't get paid the big bucks. This actor also was drunk and during the show in front of the audience, he brought a bottle of champagne onto the set, and proceeded to drink most of it. After he was good and drunk, he yelled for the producers to give champagne to the whole audience. The producers refused, so unfortunately, we were all sober for his performance.

### *Some Disadvantages to Writing a Novel*

Not having to deal with difficult actors is another major benefit of writing a novel, versus a script, but there are also disadvantages. Writing a novel is solitary and sometimes lonely. I had no one to take a coffee break with, unless you include my dogs, and I've cut them off from coffee—it makes them hyper. With a book I'm also the head of every department. It's up to me to write it, direct it, cast

it, design the sets, pick the wardrobe, and edit it when it's finished. Everything is on my shoulders.

I'm also a person who likes deadlines, and with a novel, there aren't any, which means it's easy to suffer over every word. I liked that in television, there's a clock on everything you do. The script must be ready to read at the table on Monday and to be shot in front of an audience on Friday. After the reading, you have three days to perfect it, and by Wednesday night, the words need to be locked, so the camera crew can come in and block the show. On Friday, the show is shot in front of an audience, well, a pre-COVID-19 one, and the following week, you do it all again.

### *But It's All Worth it in the End*

Despite how gratifying writing for television was—the excitement of a live audience, the glamour, the friends I made, and the knowledge that millions of people are watching—novel writing has captivated me since I first sat down to write my book. I derive deep satisfaction from creating my own characters and the world in which they live. I relish the freedom I have to write when I want and not write when I don't feel like it.

But mostly, I love the finished product. My debut novel now has a beautiful cover and designed pages and may soon sit on library shelves across the country. I also enjoy entertaining people in

whatever form, and I hope that my readers will see themselves or their family in my characters.

So I put my words and my ideas out into the world and hope people enjoy what I do, and if not, I'll put my dogs back on coffee and watch them bounce off the walls.