

# Freelancer Beverly Cramp

magazine writing & corporate communications

**P**RINT FUTURES STUDENTS TAKE NOTE: it might be wise to consider the first couple of years after graduation as an extension of your education, if you're considering making your living as a freelance writer.

So says Beverly Cramp, a self-employed professional writer making her living in Vancouver. Cramp's first experience with professional writing came after a friend suggested she write an article for *Canadian Airline Magazine*. Although she was most familiar writing in an academic style from her university days, she welcomed the conversational style of writing for consumers. But she had no idea how to market herself as a professional writer and so she dropped writing to pursue other career paths.

One path was a MBA, while another brought her to London, England, where her first job was doing business research. During that time, she noticed the vast number of magazines in London.

"London is one of the publishing capitals of the world. Not only is it the centre for the UK, but also for the whole of English-speaking

Europe," says Cramp. "They're copy-hungry!"

So, out of the blue, she phoned up the magazine offices closest to her and met personally with the editor. He was in the midst of making changes to the magazine and asked for her input about the mock-ups. Cramp had no training, beyond being a consumer of magazines, and gave her well-supported opinions freely. He was impressed with her comments; so much so that he offered her a full-time job.

For eighteen months, Cramp worked as deputy-editor in charge of special projects and was also responsible for the news stories for the magazine. She worked with freelance writers and noticed that their working conditions suited the independent-minded. It was a lifestyle that appealed to her. As deputy-editor, she got to know many of the editors of the other magazines which the publishing

company produced. One of the editors, after realizing that Cramp was interested in freelancing, offered her a job for two days a week. It gave her the security she needed and the time she required to pursue magazine writing.

After eight months, she was acquiring enough work on her own that she began to resent those two days a week on someone else's time. So she quit her day job. She was doing one to two features a week, and her portfolio was bulging – she had hundreds of articles that she had written. She was a full-fledged professional writer – and freelancing was the life for her.

Then she decided to come home. She joked with her London friends, "Would I be going to the backwaters of the publishing world?" But the fabulous landscape of British Columbia was calling for her return.

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It was a difficult first few years. In Britain, it seemed that writing opportunities just fell into her lap. Now, back in Canada, in Vancouver particularly, the conditions were very different. Only after three years of hard work can Cramp say, “I’m making an okay living.”

Here in Vancouver, Cramp supplements her magazine work with other professional writing. Her MBA has served her well. She often does corporate writing, such as market research studies, corporate newsletters, writing vignettes of fishermen changing careers, press releases, press kits, profiles of company executives, and writing for the internet. Cramp is able to remain self-employed through her continuous networking.

A significant part of that networking is derived from her membership in her professional association, the Periodical Writers Association of Canada (PWAC) of which she is the chapter treasurer. Not only do PWAC members offer each other tips about research and contacts, but often great marketing and business ideas come up on their internet list. Also, members share information about paid writing opportunities, making member-

ship in PWAC very cost-effective for the self-employed professional. “I’ve gained more work out of PWAC than what it’s cost me to join. You’ve to make your network work for you,” says Cramp.

Through her PWAC network, Cramp became involved with the BC Book Prize Board of Directors. After a year of volunteer work on the board, Cramp accepted the nomination for the part-time position of Executive Director. She’s looking forward to learning more about book publishing – an area she has yet to explore.

However, magazine writing is where her heart is, Cramp says. “I love the magazine work. I’m constantly learning. The great thing is that it allows me to ‘wade in the shallows of other disciplines’! Every time I take on a story, I’m meeting new people. Once I’ve gathered my information, then the process of how I’m going to craft the piece comes in. I find it a wonderfully life-affirming process. I get a huge amount of energy from it, positive energy. Life’s just really wonderful when I’m in that space – suddenly there’s all these possibilities and life’s just clicking along.”

Cramp is a wonderful example of someone who uses every resource to serve her goal. Her BA in Urban Geography serves her well in writing about heritage issues in Vancouver; her MBA in Marketing and Advertising not only makes her a very desirable corporate writer, but also serves her own business needs in marketing herself; her experience as a deputy-editor gives her an appreciation of what it’s like on the other end when she submits queries; and her naturally vivacious personality also serves her well in her networking with PWAC and in her work with the BC Book Prize.

Cramp admits that it has been a tough start back in Vancouver. Her personal career plan had to be set back a few years. Cramp suggests that we students set realistic expectations about freelancing. We should remember that it might take a few years to establish a working network that can support our writing.

“But,” she adds, “I have to say about the writing life: I’ve never been more poor, but I’ve never been happier.” Print Futures students are already very familiar with being poor, what we’d welcome is the “being happier”.

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