New directions for me, you, us

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

I'll say this for being sick—you get a good long lot of time to think. Since my post-deadline flu crash, I've been doing a lot of thinking. About writing, publishing, the way publishing is done, writers' communities, money, dreams and passion, doing magnificent things for the right reasons, play, joy, conquest, challenges and setbacks. And time. Depending on how sick you feel, you think a lot about time, and how you never know how much you have. I was pretty sick there for a bit, and that was weighing heavily on me.

I'm feeling almost better, don't (to the best of my knowledge) have anything fatal (except life, of course), and I don't want anyone to read my imminent demise into this post. Far as I know, I have another forty or fifty good years in me, going by previous family longevity and my recent return to healthy eating. Down 15 lbs now, and that doesn't hurt either.

But. Dreams. Fun. Passion. Magnificent things.

I've already accomplished a lot of the things I want to do with my life. My two older kids turned into responsible, caring, dream-fueled adults, and my youngest seems to be headed in the same direction. I've written a lot of novels, and I've written a lot of words to help other writers do the job I love so much. I built a little writer's community where doing the work, caring for each other and helping newer writers were the community's core values, and even though it isn't mine anymore, it's stuck to its heritage and its people are doing even more and even better than they were when it was mine.

I've stuck to my promises to myself when I started writing that I would never let myself think I knew everything there was to know, that I would fight to make each book I wrote the best book I was capable of writing, and that I would always push myself to write new things and take new risks.

There are, however, a number of goals and dreams that I have not accomplished, and I still want to reach them. In **Confessions of Wildass Dreams**, I talked about the camp. I haven't given up on the camp, but that's a money pit and I know it, and I'm still at the point where I'm living on a shoestring, not at the point where I'm in dire need of a massive tax write-off.

The camp, though, isn't my only unfulfilled dream. I've been studying publishing; the effects of chain stores on books, writers and careers; alternative methods for selling and publicizing books; how other businesses do things, especially other small businesses … a lot of stuff.

I want to become a publisher, to have a publishing company that puts out extraordinary books that aren't necessarily of interest to mainstream publishing, to do wonderful projects aimed solely at a niche market, that sells outside of mainstream channels (and perhaps, eventually, through them). I love fiction, I love nonfiction, and I've been experimenting with my own books and those of a few friends and colleagues for the past year and a half with my little e-book store, and with the addition of bound-and-printed books through Lulu.com. I've delved into unconventional advertising with the affiliate program with pretty decent results, and into conventional advertising with expensive, dreary non-results. I've tried podcasting (I love it, but work deadlines just wreck a podcasting schedule), and I'm looking at producing a couple of writing-workshop videos to distribute for free via You-Tube.

Writing is one of my great passions. Books are another. Paying forward is a third. I think putting these things together, to

create a little publishing house for books about writing and books that pay forward by helping other people reach their dreams (even if those dreams aren't writing), and maybe even some fiction of magnificent quality would be a worthwhile endeavor. I'd want it to be a pro publishing house—paying writers advances plus royalties; having the best pro-writer contracts around; hiring qualified, passionate editors, book designers, artists, marketers. But I'd want it to be more than that. Employee-owned and operated, a closely-held small corporation where every employee owned stock in the business and thrived as it thrived. Maybe where every writer who published through the house received stock in the business so long as his or her books remained with the company. Where everyone had an investment in making every single project that went through the house something special. Something extraordinary. And where everyone who worked with the company—whether as employees, subcontractors, or customers—found it ethical, passionate, playful, dedicated, and wonderful.

I see this publishing company as a place driven by common goals and shared love, staying small and personal on purpose, pushing for excellence rather than volume, making enough money for all the people who work for it, but not trying to take over the world. There are a couple of books I've read just in the last few days that have proven to me that this is not just a lovely dream, but an actual, sensible, practical working philosophy that is already in effect with extraordinary businesses around the country. The first is *SMALL GIANTS: Companies That Choose to Be Great Instead of Big*, by Bo Burlington. The second is *FISH!: A Remarkable Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results*, by Stephen C. Lundin, Harry Paul, and John Christensen.

I'm presenting this as something I want to do, but also something I cannot do by myself. I'd like to include you. A lot of you have been with me in one capacity or another since

1991, when I sold my first book, and some of you well before that. Some of you I know in real life, others only as pixels. But I'd like to know what you think of the idea, and more, I'd like to hear ideas on how to make it happen. **How to bring together people from across the country and perhaps from around the world to do this thing, now, from where we are, with no start-up money, using such tools as we already have available**—e-books and Lulu.com, the Internet, free or inexpensive software, marketing that is going to have to be guerrilla, viral, oddball and offbeat. How to make it legal, how to protect the interests of everyone who comes onboard, how to make it profitable for everyone involved, how to make it a joyous, exciting, magnificent, passion-fueled, success.

This is all about pay-it-forward. About bringing the people who have been part of your success up with you. About doing something that matters for all the right reasons—as Ben Franklin said, it's about doing well by doing good.

Tell me what you think. Let me know if this is doable, more than just a pipe dream. Tell me how we can make it happen, and if it speaks to you, matters to you, calls to you, then tell me why.

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