

## **Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 5: Who Am I?**

**By Cathe Jones, ([cathejones.com](http://cathejones.com))**

A biography is one of the most important segments of your writing experience. It lets agents know who you are, it tells publishers your credentials, and it introduces you to other convention visitors who have to decide if they'll attend your workshops. It's also one of the most difficult things to write.

I have four bios. Yes, four. If I am asked for a "bit about the author", I will send a paragraph version. If I am asked for "something about you", I will send a short, interesting paragraph version. The Master of Ceremonies introducing me may want "a few words", so a single sentence will do. If I'm not given direction, I will send the longest version, hoping that a good editor will use what she feels is necessary.

Who you are stated in a sentence or less is probably the most confusing. Toastmasters is a great way to learn about get-to-the-point welcoming statements. You are expected to shake a person's hand, and let them know your name, your title, your current and most important accomplishment and nothing more. Keep this in mind when you are writing a query. You can use this statement as a diving board into specifics relating to your writing projects.

**"Master of Ceremonies" Example 1:** I am Cathe Jones, freelance essayist, currently working on a book called Godless Grief, an atheist guide to mourning.

There's not an elaboration on my accomplishments, my education, my work history, or anything unimportant...especially my age! This is the exact comment that would work for introduction onto the panel at a

conference. Everyone likes to talk about himself or herself. It's just human nature. Both Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain point out that the word "I" is the most used, if not abused, in the English language. Biographical comments work well in third person for this very reason.

A writing friend emailed me about sixty times in two days searching for a way to make a query letter to a well-known agency. "They just want a little bit about me... I haven't done enough!" For a new writer, this is a self-built wall of CAN'T. Keeping in mind that the word can't means "Will Not Try", I told her in a paragraph all of the things she knew about herself that was pertinent to her book.

**"A Bit about the Author" Example 2:** Mary Smith, an award-winning chef, maintains recipes from generations dating back to the Mayflower. Lady's Home Journal picked four of her recipes in the last six years as top three in the Family Nights In Contest. The Tennessee Office of Public Affairs has named Mrs. Smith as Caretaker of the Year for her work in bringing food to low income families in her neighborhood. She currently lives in Nashville, working in her family restaurant, with her husband and three daughters.

In fact, Mary, (name changed per her request), has done quite a bit. For as long as I've known her, she has always worked in the kitchen. She's served five Presidents, and The Duchess of York. Her twelve-table diner sits in a slum area of Nashville, and is always busy. Her short paragraph worked well for the query of the cookbook. However, she completely undermined her own accomplishments by using the word "can't". It wasn't that she was unable to state facts. Her humble nature prevented her from bragging. She was asked to write "A bit about the author", and this was what we worked on together. Many of us face the dilemma of

braggadocio versus statement of fact. In a query, a blend of both works best.

Overstatement is a major obstacle for many of us, simply because we have done a lot of things. In my life, I've lived in eleven states, earned five degrees, married three times, (the last time is the keeper), performed stand-up, taught college, performed as Porky Pig at Magic Mountain, and so much more. When I have to write longer "who you are" statements, I tend to include the bizarre life memories because they tell an editor more about me than a bulleted list. They also sell me as a talk show guest, and as interview subject.

"Something about you" : As a stand-up comedienne, Italian rapier student, and rat wrangler, Cathe Jones certainly lives an interesting life. This humorist writes about the people she's met, and the marked affect they've had on her life. This Las Vegas citizen is a proud member of the "happily married" club, and has never been seen wearing feathers or high heels while riding her wheelchair around casinos in search of the world's best bagel.

Here we have a short paragraph, that doesn't say much about my writing, but does point out silly factoids which sets me apart from my peers. In this case, I'm selling myself as comedic humorist for a disability friendly magazine. I point out my disability, while strong sentences show my quirks. If the periodical were about animals, I'd focus on the rat wrangling.

When closing a query, or introduction, let the reader know about any website you have. Websites offer a location where an editor or agent can further research your accomplishments and abilities. My website shows articles I've written, books I'm shopping, and of course, biographical

information in much longer, chatty-Cathe mode. It also has a headshot, so the editors can see if I'm marketable to television.

The unfortunate truth of writing in today's market is the expectation that an author is willing and able to sell herself. Our work is now spent in keeping ourselves in the public eye, creating a buzz, devising methods of sales, and showing a corporation that our lowly project is worth their attention and investment. You MUST spend time making yourself a Product as worthy as your book. Your introduction statement is your commercial.

The last version of the biography is the long form. I sent the bio below to several organizations, including the National Association of Women Writers. I wrote it as my 30 Second Television commercial. I not only want my work to be noticed, I want my style and oddities to be noted. The voice stays active, and the telling is in third person. The plan is to tease the editor with things to come.

"Longer Bio" Example 4: Cathe Jones, formerly a stand-up comedienne performing under the name Cathe B, writes essays and non-fiction pieces for periodicals throughout the United States, Australia, the U.K., and Canada. From the time she was eight years old, The Boston Herald American printed her poetry and stories, up until her entry into the U. S. Navy. Her first chapbooks, DeepNdarkNblue, and Talkin' to the Folks, served as a platform for a spoken word tour in the 1980s. Cathe received her MFA from the prestigious California Institute of the Arts, served as a professor at New Mexico Highlands University, and lecturer at San Francisco State University and California State University, Sacramento. This year, Mrs. Jones married her long time boyfriend, jazz pianist Mike Jones, near their home in Las Vegas. She is currently shopping three non-fiction books, including Godless Grief, an Atheist guide to mourning

loss (godlessgrief.com). You can read more about Cathe at CatheJones.com.

Here are sites to find out more about writing Bios.

Writing a Basic Bio

<http://www.writing-world.com/basics/bio.shtml>

Music Biz Bios, but works for writers

<http://www.musicbizacademy.com/knab/articles/artistbio.htm>

Four Steps for A Good Bio

[http://julieduffy.com/writing/inventing\\_the\\_author.htm](http://julieduffy.com/writing/inventing_the_author.htm)

Great Short author bio:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/dickkingsmith/bio.html>