**Behind the Prose Transcript**

**Episode 34: Elana Rabinowitz**

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Host:

Keysha Whitaker [KW]

Guests:

Elana Rabinowitz [ER]

[KW] Hey Behind the Prosers. I'm back it's episode 34 of Behind the Prose. Thanks for rocking with me. We're going into the second year of the show and I know I've slowed down at the beginning of the year, so it's been school; my dog died, so it's been kind of slow, but nevertheless I still do have some good shows lined up for you, including today's episodes featuring a new essayist who has landed some pretty good clips over the next year or so and so we'll talk to her.

Her name is Elana Rabinowitz.

Also on my check in, I've been telling you about my chunks. I'm still working on my chunks of 20 and I'm almost done with the second chunk - not the second chunk - I mean this chunk. I've got one more to go. This chunk has been kind of depressing though because I've done about 19 things and I think, I haven't gotten any acceptances. I've also been slowing down trying to figure out what it is that I want to write regularly and consistently because there's so many different outlets and angles and places, I have so many different interests sometimes, it's overwhelming.

I actually think today's guest is a good person to talk about that because she is a nonfiction fiction writer. She is a writer and a lifelong teacher. She writes from a tender heart about growing up in Brooklyn. She writes about travel and relationships. She writes about the world. IN the work that I've read, she always seem stop have one sentence in there that just kind of hits the reader that sums up, not in a cheesy way, but in sort of a simple and profound way about how her piece speaks to herself and also to the rest of us.

With that said, I want to welcome Elana Rabinowitz.

[ER] Thank you so much Keysha. And I loved being called a writer outloud and that you said I'm profound so it's already off to a great start.

[Laughter]

[KW] Good, let's keep it going that way. I found your work on this Facebook group that we are both members of, called Binders of Essayists. Maybe a few weeks ago, I saw you had posted, or someone had posted that you had a clip in the New York Times, in the Metropolitan Diary, and I reached out to you. I said, she seems cool. She's got a wide variety of essays published. You're doing nonfiction which as everyone knows who listens is what I studied at The New School. So I'm glad that you responded.

[ER] Yeah, thanks for reaching out. Thanks for noticing my little clip in The Times. I have to pinch myself every time that I actually got in. As a writer, it's actually a funny story how I got to that point, if you'd like to hear it.

[KW] Of course.

[ER] Basically, so writing comes from all different places and inspiration and this particular story is something that happened to me a few months ago where I was walking to work and I had this embarrassing story. I'm walking and listening to music and I'm getting in my groove and I don't realize that my skirt is hanging out and it was a construction worker who actually tapped me on the shoulder to let me know.

And I'm walking in Park Slope and all these people are smiling but nobody had the courage to say something and it's sort of like the "Reverse cat call," the last person that you would suspect. And I'm telling this story and I don't know what to do with it and people are always telling, write the story that only you could tell or you have to write this, and I'm thinking how can I write this story.

I wrote it out and I made it this 900-word essay like I'm trained to do. And I submitted it to a few places and there were no bites, but I had this happen a few times with a major publications, where I sent it to an editor and they kindly wrote back.

This particular piece I sent to an editor at The Gothamist because I thought it was very New York and he wrote back the nicest email and said that's not really what we're looking for, but have you thought about the New York Times Metro Diary? And here's the link to their site.

And like, who does that? You can barely get a response from an editor. I don't know this man, I do know because I email him all the time - thank you, thank you, you changed my life - So I get the email and I don't know quite what to do, but I feel like I have to give it a try.

But how do you make a 900 essay a 300-word essay? How do you edit out? I managed to do it and I send it in. A few weeks later, I get the response that it's accepted. I would haven never thought to make this funny little anecdote into a three-hundred word essay and then send it out to the New York Times, but basically a stranger who took the time to read this essay, and something must have resonated or just the kindness of his own heart, and later it was published.

And I sent him immediately, before any family member, I found the original email thread and I said, I have to thank you so much.

[KW] Did he respond?

[ER] Absolutely. He said congratulations Elana. I think he then followed me on Twitter. I felt like I made it. I had the respect of another editor right away. And of course, seeing yourself in the New York Times is completely surreal because you're actually reading the paper and you see your name there. It's incredible.

[KW] There's so many things in that which I want to unpack. Originally the piece was 900. How did you approach whittling it down to 300? What was that revision process for you like?

[ER] I found that I was surprisingly a better editor than I thought I could be. The first time I did it, I couldn't get it to less than 500 words. I couldn't let go of my darlings - I forget the expression - but every word as a writer is so important to you and it's so carefully chosen - and when you get rid of something, you feel like you're leaving out the essential story. Then you realize that so much that you add for description can be taken away.

I just thought about it as if I was writing basically a movie trailer or I wanted to get the point across and what needed to be kept in. It was a tough decision. It's agonizing to let go of your words and I just left out a lot of descriptive details and a chunk of sort of what happened once I got to school and the aftermath and really just focused on the one connection with the particular construction worker and tried to hone in - but it's a tough choice 'cause you don't know what words to leave in and what to take out - and I hope that I made the right choices.

Sometimes that information not being there can lead people to make assumptions. You want to explain yourself further but it became a process of letting go, which is something that I'm learning to do as a writer. It's hard to let go of your work but once you do, it just frees it up.

[KW] Did you work with another writer or a group when you were doing the editing of that?

[ER] Oh good question. Ever since I started writing - or getting published, since I've been writing since I was a little kid - I've always had some kind of writing group or writing partner. I worked with them when I wrote the 900-word essay. I told you everyone was like 'oh that's too funny' but I didn't get a tremendous amount of feedback because it wasn't as serious of a piece and then I had one writing partner that I work with quite frequently, and she was the one to really hold my hand and say 'let it go' but I actually did the editing by myself because they were my words and I couldn't let someone else tell me.

It's hard to get it down to 300 words.

[KW] It's exactly 300 words. I did a word count.

[ER] Laughter

[KW] Let's take a little step back and talk about your professional writing career. When did that launch, as far as you saying, I'm going to write and pitch and publish.

[ER] So that's been a long process. I started writing in college and did a lot of things with college newspapers and journalism but never really thought that was something that I could take to the outside world. And every couple years, whenever I was in New York City, I ended up taking some kind of adult education writing class and learned how to write these essays, and I'd leave the class and I'd have these essays and I don't know what to do with them. Sometimes I keep them; sometimes I don't, but I'd never gone to the next step. And a lot happened in my personal life which I wrote about a year ago, and somehow on a whim, I decided last year during spring break when I had a little extra money and time, I was gonna take a class and I was gonna figure out how to get published. And that came about from going to a career counselor because I was sort of dissatisfied with my job just as a teacher and I wanted to explore other areas of creativity and it came out that everyone that knew me well, knew that I loved writing and encouraged me to pursue it.

So I took this class, and I had taken a class with, I think you know Sue Shapiro as a lot of us new writers do, and I took her class which I was terrified to take because I know that she's very open and you have to really feel very comfortable with yourself in that class.

And I took this five week class out of her apartment and from the first moment that I read the piece outloud I knew something was going to happen. And the very first piece out of that class, I got published. And from then on, I would say, she's really responsible, that particular class that taught me what the next step is - how do you get published which is a missing piece from a lot of wonderful writing programs.

[KW] And that first piece which piece was that? The psychic piece?

[ER] Yeah, absolutely it was terrifying in a lot of way, but I chose to write it and chose to read it in the middle of class and I had to stop in the middle of class and had someone read it because I started to well up from the emotion. I didn't know how to get it published and Sue would email me and help me. She really wanted it published herself - she really felt for me with that particular piece and we would brainstorm together and I finally got it published.

Ironically, shortly thereafter, a friend of a friend looked at it and he's actually considering making it a short film. So that's sort of the dream. My crazy life is sort of interesting to a filmmaker.

So you never know what can come out when you reveal yourself.

[KW] You seem to do that with art and skill. It doesn't seem like - um - what's the word I'm looking for, it seems focused in a way, the way that you write - when you get further into the pieces themselves, I'll pull out some of these things. So that was about two years ago when you started actually taking classes?

[ER] I took the class last April, so almost a year ago. This process is less than a year old.

[KW] Oh yea cuz 2015 was just last year. I feel like it's two years ago.

[KW] Everyone go to the Behind the Prose show page for Elana, you can see all her clips, you can read her very first piece that came out of Susan Shapiro's class. She was on Behind the Prose Episode 25 - plug plug plug - go listen to it. It's amazing.

That XOJane piece is "It happened to me: I got addicted to psychics while looking for love."

Um, and so let's - since then you have been published in XOJane, YourTango, SheKnows,  HelloGiggles, The Billfold which is like a type of a publication as a part of Medium, and then you were in the Villager and the Kveller - did I say that right?

[ER] I think that's right. Good job.

[KW] Let me go back to my notes. Let's go back to the Metropolitan Diary piece.

The piece is called Courtesy in a Hard Hat. Did you come up with that title?

[ER] That was one of the few interactions they did have. They said 'Did he wear a hard hat? We think it would make a good title and I said I believe he did.'

[KW] What was your title before?

[ER] Something like, an unlikely hero?  A construction worker hero? Something with the idea of hero in there being kind of ironic. I forget the exact title.

[KW] When you were working on this to get it down to the 300? Did you go and read some of their pieces?

[ER] I did go and read some of their pieces, and very few of them were that big so I got nervous. The first time I'd got it down to 500, then to 300 and most of them were these poignant little noticings or maybe one or two sentences, almost like haikus of New York City and I got nervous because mine's so big, and suddenly 300 words seemed enormous and what were they going to do with it.

But I didn't change the flavor of what I wrote. I just had to go with my gut and that they chose it for a reason. I was nervous they were going to make it shorter, and they didn't.

[ER] In reading the other ones, they can be these beautifully poignant piece and often things they just overhear so I was surprised that they let almost a full story get in there, and it was one of the first ones on the page so that was thrilling for me.

[KW] In that piece, you have a scene; you have backstory. You have return to the present scene; it does do a lot within that 300 word - but now that you say your original title it makes sense.

One of the notes that I took was 'first two grafs set up the conflict with construction workers or walking down the street and being harassed and just kind of putting on your buds and not wanted to be bothered, so it kind of sets up this potential anxiety in the reader that we think something bad is going to happen. I was going to ask you if that was intentional but then when I went back and looked at the title, I was like oh, well, no the title tells us what happens.

No that you say your original title - it wasn't as overt as what the editors picked - it makes sense how I read

[ER] Right, because that's the way the original story was going and it's sort of building up, kind of bringing you back to my upbringing in New York and what I was going through and just the anxiety that I would feel and then now, I mean that's like my favorite block to walk by.

I do still look for that man. I honestly do.

[KW] So when you write, do you have a special writer's area or time?

[ER] I know everybody has, I always feel like a special kind of writer because one, my schedule is so different because I am a full-time department of ed public school middle school teacher - very demanding job. When I do write, I try and find some routine with it. It has to be in a comfortable seat or on the floor. I usually write at the table that I have that has this really cozy seat that looks out the window. I kind of need some natural light, or there's one other chair in the room and those are the only two places that I can write within my own apartment.

I can't go to a coffee shop. I can't seem to write around other people unless it's a writer's workshop. For some reason, sitting with other writers sort of accelerates the process, but generally it's those two places and those are the only places that I can really write. I have to be well-rested and focused. I can't be reading too much that morning or have too many other distractions because I really need to focus on what I need to say in a short amount of time.

[KW] What comes first for you? You have over a dozen publications since last June, what comes first for you: the idea or the outlet?

[ER] Hmmm. That's an excellent question. I think that I do much better when I work on the idea because if something is very personal to me, it just grabs me and it's quite easier to write because I like the idea of the story-telling. When I've tried the outlets, and I've tried to work around or 'Oh, I'd really love to be in Marie Claire, or I'd really love to be in this type of magazine,' it almost doesn't come out right and I haven't been that successful. And I've tried - because I really want to get into a higher level and I've been extremely lucky in the short time that I'm writing and I'm very fortunate for that, but then I'm also have all these people pushing me - 'You should be in these certain publications' and I try to write for them and it almost never works because it's not genuine for me.

But I think that could be a level of skill as I get more familiar and over time I can master that. But for me the writing comes from a personal place from a connection with a person or something that happens that moves me to write something. That's how it works for me.

[KW] So you have an idea for a connection, let's take one of these examples, this piece that ran in the beginning of March in the Seattle Times, "Sweet Memories of Helping Plant Trees in Sri Lanka Came Flooding Back." What was  - my brain just went bloop - what was the impetus for the idea for this piece?

[ER] Sure, sure. That's another great story as well because being part of these various "binders" or different websites where you are around other writers at least virtually, I had seen an article that somebody had placed something about going back and looking at your old pieces and re-working them and getting them published.

And a while ago, I can't remember exactly when, through Facebook, I had connected with my hostess from the time that I was in the Peace Corps which was twenty years ago, quite a long time ago and quite bizarre to have Facebook connections from a pre-internet time in a third-world country that was so different. She sent me this beautiful post with pictures of these rambutan, these fruit project that I had worked on twenty years ago and this lovely comment under it how my other host sister who speaks no English just wanted to make sure that I knew that the fruit had grown and they were enjoying these beautiful objects and thank you so much.

And so much of Facebook is people bragging and other kinds of things in it, and it was just this incredible moment in time where I really needed someone to say thank you or you had purpose during that time. And I wrote this article and it didn't come out very good and I didn't know what to do with it. And often, it's my other friends that encourage the writing. Not just the writing group, but I have a large group of very close friends that constantly are asking about my writing or I'll send the articles to them just to get a different perspective.

And one said, you have to get back to that piece. I tried and I just couldn't find the right venue for it. Finally, I was looking and looking and trying all these New York venues, but it's really a story about trees and nature. And I thought, Seattle. Seattle will take it. And they took it the next day.

And the editor there was one of the nicest editor that I ever worked with. I can't think of one editor that I don't adore now. I feel like I've made these acquaintances slash friends. I mean he was so polite and so excited by the article and particularly - he said we don't really take people from out of state but I was so moved by this piece and it was such a great piece and it was just really a pleasure to work with. And he even followed up after the piece to say what a great read it was.

It was such a great experience to be chosen. I mean, the New York Times is incredible but it felt that much more special that I wasn't living in the area and still somehow my words resonated for them.

[KW] That's actually one of the questions that I had. What made you - Seattle Times - how did you get there? So that's a perfect thing that people can learn to think about audience and who might want what you have and don't just think about your circle or whatever.

[ER] That's so important. Since I started this class, I now have a list, I make a spreadsheet and I add to it everyday and I'm constantly researching places to send articles to. You had asked me earlier - I don't necessarily write for the Seattle Times, but when you're thinking about who will take it, it really has to make sense. It has to go to a place that wants it. Just like anything that you do. It doesn't mean don't try for other publications because they were not my first choice, but when it is the right fit, they do respond kind of quickly, which is great.

If they respond at all.

[KW] That's my thing. I think when you send to outlets today, if they don't get back to you in a week - well, I guess that's not necessarily true because New York Times says if you don't hear from us in three weeks, expect not to - but I think for the most part when people want something they kind of respond quickly. I don't know. Maybe that's a stereotype on my part.

[ER] Especially because this was considered an op-ed piece so they tend to go kind of quickly, but yeah, it is amazing when you get the email the same day. It's like what have I done right?

[KW] The opening quote on that, did you pick the quote for that?

[ER] That's so funny that you noticed that is because that is another thing that Sue is always talking about in her classes: a timely lead, a timely lead, and I couldn't come up with a good lead. I think that's what was making the story kind of lag, I couldn't figure out how to segue into it. And somewhere, I didn't look for it, somebody had posted this quote and I was like 'Are you kidding? This is a real quote? The best time to plant the tree is twenty years ago.'  And the story takes place twenty years ago about trees and it just worked so seamlessly I had to use it.

[KW] That's the exact note that I have: The quote transitions seamlessly into the first line. And it almost feels like you couldn't have wrote - you couldn't have written this story any other time - based on that quote at least.

[ER] It's amazing and the quote came afterward. I think there's something for sort of sitting on a piece and I wasn't looking for it. I think it's sort of that same concept of when you're not pushing it because I'd tried a million different ways to start it and nothing seemed genuine and then this quote came to me. And that night I sent it out and that morning I got a response from the Seattle Times.

[KW] How long did this piece take you to write?

[ER] You know when I write a piece, I write it fairly quickly because it sort of flows out of me, if that makes sense. Something happens to me when I write and everything just sort of comes out naturally and then I go back and work it a few times and then I'll have at least two people look at it if I can get it into a class workshop - this particular one I did not. And but I put it away for six months and I came back to it and reworked it four or five times and I finally found the good quote and that sealed the deal. He had very few edits on the actual piece which is always lovely as well because he was a real editor - someone who sat there line by line and checked everything. And sometimes they just quickly - there are certain publications that I won't mention by name, but they don't edit at all and that comes back to haunt you because the trolls will say - you could write the most heart wrenching personal piece - she didn't use enough commas or she spelled this word wrong and that's what they focus on.

[KW] You said you worked it a few times. When you go back in terms of your revision process, what does that mean for you?

[ER] Generally, what I try to do, is I learned very quickly to print out your piece because you have to see it on paper. Even if I have an audience or not, I read it out loud because I write my pieces really to be read out loud. Then I look back and usually I end up cutting out part of it. Ever since the New York Times article, I've become this expert of letting things go which is the greatest lesson I learned from that and then finding the perfect word if you can. You know if there's a way to say something better or way to say something in a simple way that's gonna hit more people and then I usually want other people to look at and see if there's any confusion because I'm in the piece. I was in the piece. I know these words, and I'm using foreign words and that's not popular. You know? Does this make sense? Do you feel anything from it because I want every piece I write to evoke emotion, whether it's laughter or tears, but it should evoke emotion that's my goal as a writer.

[KW] You said you put it away for six months. Why did you choose to put it away?

[ER] I didn't like it. I just felt like I wrote it and it was written to sort of, you know I was touched at the moment and I wrote it out, but it didn't flow well. It didn't have a lot of emotion to it and then when I saw that posting about go back and work your old pieces, I thought this is an important piece and an important part of my life and essentially I waited twenty years for it. So when I went back to it, you know sometimes you really have to step away from pieces.

It has to be where you are in your own life and I had enough distance and I was feeling more confident with my writing. I was getting published now in major publications and I felt like I would have the nuance to make it a better story. And I had - you know - it was the right time, if that makes any sense.

[KW] One of the, in this piece, one of the sentences as I said earlier you have this way of having these sentences in there that really kind of hit the reader and make the reader stop and think about what this piece means to you and the world at large and one of those sentences - those Super Sentences I call them - Is in that piece

[ER] Ooh, I love that.

 [KW] In that piece, you say - I'm gonna call you Elana Super Sentence Rabinowitz.

[ER] You can call me that any day. I'm totally going to steal the super sentence line. I love it. It's like superwoman. I love it. Yes, go. I'm so curious what my super sentence is.

[KW] "It's just like the fruit itself. I was filled with sweetness and happiness in such a way I didn't think possible that perhaps my time there was not for naught."

[ER] Ah. That's so funny that was like the one line we had to edit together because it was a little confusing when I first wrote it, so we did a good job if that's the one that resonated for you. It was really a powerful thing to write and to experience because you feel as a volunteer, you know, a lot of people do these things and they want to do it to tell people about it or to feel good about yourself and the whole time I was there, I kept thinking I'm making these wonderful connections and I'm doing things, but what really happens? Actually the goal of Peace Corps is to learn about another culture and to also teach people about that other culture and to be able to do that through the article, actually it's the one article because all my essays are so personal and I teach middle school, it's the one article I've been teaching to my students because there's nothing that that's revealing in it and to see what they get out of it so that I'm continuing the process of teaching them.

But it it's inexplicable, if that's a word, or unexplainable to get an email like that or to think that, you know, there is this thing that has been born through you, especially with my other articles and what I've been going through in my life. It's this happiness that something will continue you when you're gone and that's how I chose to phrase it.

[KW] And you do write about the personal as you said, and one of those personal pieces came out in the Washington Post in December last year. That one's called "My friends were popping out babies in their forties. Couldn't I be next?"

985 words in their column Solo-ish and you also had a line in that one too that struck me. And that line was "To lose at love is something I've come to accept, but to lose at motherhood is a battle I still fight with every baby bump I see and every first posted on Facebook."

[ER] Yeah, that's gonna make me cry too. That line and that piece is actually interesting that you chose to hone in on that because this was a piece I also wrote and then put away and read to my writing partner who at the time was pregnant through IVF and she hadn't told anyone. I read her this piece and she started crying hysterically. It touched her so much and she was the one that insisted I write it and send it out. To me, it was just sort of a personal piece, like a therapy piece to deal with the process of what I had gone through. This is yet another story of sending it to an editor, I sent it to a website called Lies about Parenting - I found it in my search - and the woman wrote back to me this beautiful email and it said something like 'I'd love to use your piece but it needs - it's such an important message, it needs a bigger venue and here are the places you should submit it and one of them was The Washington Post. And I had submitted it to The Washington Post but had heard nothing back.

This time one of the things I learned, and I think this is great advice to anyone is that if you're really confident that a piece belongs somewhere - you know really confident - if someone else, a stranger tells you their level of confidence - I just really worked on rewriting a better pitch and saying the importance of this piece because I felt compelled to get it published in a big publication after this woman wrote these poignant words.

Then, once I did, they sent it to, I think it was - - they sent it to Solo-ish and the next day I got this email from the Washington Post and I'm still shaking every time I think of this email because it wasn't written for a large audience; it was written for me and my writing partner maybe and the impact that it had on them made me realize it needed to be in a bigger venue. And once it was out there - and it was very difficult for me to reveal myself in that way - I have never received so many emails from people all over the world. People from New Zealand saying they were rooting for me. So many men that I knew that had similar issues in their own relationships, just so many people that I knew wanting to talk about the subject. I realized, and I had to thank this woman, this little website for basically changing my life and hopefully the life of someone else who as considering fertility who didn't know enough about it at an early enough age.

But to go back to your specific - because I think I went off topic - yeah, it's a very emotional time, and that line and section was rewritten later when I had a little distance again and that's what was pointed out was the strongest part of my piece, the more relatable part.

And that wasn't there in the beginning because I wasn't honest with myself at the time of writing it. When I had just that small distance from it, I was able to be more honest in my writing.

[KW] You said you went back and worked on a better pitch. What made it better?

[ER] Right, that's a good question. I still have so much to learn; I think I need to talk a one-day class how to pitch. You hear different ways to do it, but I think I usually just write a short thing of what the title is and a short synopsis and this one was more to the life imperative that this piece be published and how important it was for women and other women. It was very strong. And the other pitches were more just a summary and this one was saying, you have to publish this, essentially, and it got the message because it was the same email where I had sent, maybe months ago that I got no response.

So sometimes when you’re not getting a response, it could simply be that your pitch wasn't strong enough.

I think the only reason this particular pitch was strong was because this woman told me it was so powerful so I felt that more courage to write it and to make sure. I don't think that I would normally on my own write such a strong pitch and I'm learning that's something that I need to do.

[KW] Which is the second time at least that an editor has referred you to a publication.

[ER] I love editors. I love them.

[KW] The first paragraph includes a pop culture reference like Gwen Stefani and celebrities having babies in their forties. Did you write the intro that way because you wanted to make it contemporary for the Post?

[ER] That's so interesting. So I wrote the intro and I just said something to the point of celebrities were popping out babies and I said, which ones and I just chose a few and I think unbeknownst to me, that made it go even more viral and then it became picked up by celebrity websites. It became picked up by so many places. It was actually just picked up by the Chicago Tribune - the same article so it just really went quite viral. That was really just the editors tip. You know, I was just writing it. When celebrities do anything it's fine, and when regular people do it, it's questioned.

I was still insecure with my own decision and it was the editor's idea to use their specific names. I wasn't trying to be so heavy.

[KW] I know you said that when you get inspired you have a story that you want to tell, but within less than a year, you have got twelve publications, so is there a schedule that you have yourself on as far as pitching or do you set to do something once a month?

[ER] I pitch constantly and I write constantly. It's not in any particular schedule.

[KW] What does constantly mean?

[ER] So it's not - well the pitching is constant, the writing isn't as constant. So on any given day that I have access to a computer, during working hours, I will either go back in my sent mailbox to see if enough time has passed to check up on a piece and revisit with an editor to follow up or if there's something that I feel that they're not picking up, can I send it to another publication.

So it might be the same piece that I'm just continuing - because I'm relentless. I'm not giving up. I think that's why I've had the success I've had with the numbers because some people just get - they take it really personally and I can't afford that so, I'm just like okay, they didn't want it, their loss. So many people said no to the Washington Post piece so I now learn that it's just like what I had said earlier, it's finding the right venue. And I'm taking classes still.

I'm taking a class at the New School with Sue, so I have to write at least weekly for that. And most of that comes on the weekends because during the week, it's harder. So during the week, I'm usually sending out pitches, maybe doing some quick editing but it's constant. I think some editors are ready to kill me, so I have to set it back a little bit.

Because I just feel like I don't wanna, if I wrote something, especially if it's a timely piece, I have to make sure it gets out there in time and someone's looking at it but I'm also getting better at knowing these aren't the right publications or don't wanna keep sending to some places that are not responding to you at all.

[KW] What's your rule for timely pieces? Do you try to avoid places that don't allow simultaneous submissions? Do you say in your cover letter, if I don't hear from you in a couple days . . .

[ER] I should say that always. Sometimes I do; sometimes I don't and I do simultaneous submissions. Not on a timely piece, but I've had myself where I've been accepted to more than one so I've learned my lesson and I try to pace it. But with a timely piece, if I can and I feel like it's not going to harm me, I'll let them know that I'm sending it out to multiple places. I'm not sure - some places that I've emailed, they said even for a web, an online site that you don't think you need as much time prior, they said you know, we need six weeks because I wanted to do a holiday piece.

And I just did something about my accountant which was this really cute piece and I wanted to make sure it got out in time. It just was published last week I believe, but I didn't want to wait for a week or two right before because I didn't think that was enough leadtime, so I haven't figured out the nuance yet. I haven't done anything until last minute and had it accepted.

It's pretty hard to get things in high holidays, but I'm noticing other holidays like if you can do a little something on Valentine's Day or this thing about tax season, well Valentine's Day for sure, but the tax season, it's just trying to get it in before, trying to let the editors know.

That's the best thing you can do. But sometimes I'm afraid I'm going to irritate a person by doing that so maybe I'll just wait a day or two and then I'll send it somewhere else.

[KW] You said that um -I don't think I finished my second cup of coffee this morning. My brain just went bloop, part two - It's about the simultaneous submissions - at any rate, The New York Times, when they sent you back the email, they said, oh we want to check if it's still available, and I know they do say - oh I know what the question was -

What happened when you had the two pieces accepted at the same time?

Was one of them a place that said no simultaneous submissions and you did it anyway. How did you get out that situation and did the piece get published somewhere?

[ER] Right, so I have to be careful. These were not - for example - if I pitched The New York Times or if I pitched the Washington Post, I only pitched them. But when it comes to some piece that's a little fluffier or a little bit lighter. I didn't think this piece was going to get published; it was about a dating thing. I sent it out late on a Sunday night after I met with my writing partner and that same morning, two different places were like we love it. I didn't know what to do, so I was just honest and said, I'm new to writing and didn't realize I already had sent it out and they were fine with it because one of the places - I had published in both of them before and I just chose, I think one paid more as well, and I did it that way.

And then I learned, I always thought it was a good thing to do because I don't want to wait too long in between but it taught me a valuable lesson to pace it if you can or if not - and I still, I was still accepted afterwards for one of the places. So it hasn't harmed me. I tend to be honest, but I think at a certain level you have to pitch, and I'm starting to try and keep spread sheets  of who I'm sending and when and doing the follow up but it's hard because sometimes you have to wait so long and the piece might lose interest.

[KW] Last couple questions for you. What, if you would like to share with us, and in terms you just mentioned that one of the outlets might have paid or paid more, how has the income been from your freelancing? We know many outlets don't pay but some of them do and I think maybe probably the Times pays and Washington Post. Would you be willing to share with us any of your windfalls.

[ER] Yes, well ideally, I would love to be a full-time freelance writer and it does not pay very well. The piece in the NYT they don't pay for their diaries; they pay for their other places, but I wasn't going to say no. Even the Seattle Times does not pay and I asked him and he said, well I understand if you don't want to use us, but again I said yes because of the publication itself.

I make a point, unless it's a major publication at this point, I don't do anything for free. A lot of the pieces paid from $25 to $100. I haven't made more than that on any particular piece. I'd love to because then I could make different decisions and I've been fairly successful in the pieces, but that's a choice you have to make as well. I think going forward, it would be nice to get paid a little more and then I could consider that going forward. But a lot of the pieces don't pay tremendously.

[KW] Do you find out before you pitch a place that it's a paying outlet? Sometimes, that's not info that's on their website.

[ER] I research fairly well. I've been tricked a few times and I haven't said yes yet. I did once get tripped, they published it and it wasn't paying and there's no way I can get it back, and I wouldn't have said yes. But there were  - because it was a very timely piece and they sent it out right away. A lot of times, I'll send it to a magazine and they'll send it to their online division and I get this enthusiastic email, oh we'd love to publish it but we can't pay.

I'd love to be part of these websites but I also feel this allegiance to the freelancers and I want writers to get paid more. I know a lot of people don't write for Huff Post because they don't pay their writers usually, and I'm trying to - even though I have another source of income - be united on that front that at least I get something. And I have negotiated rates as well.

If I've written for more than one, I've asked for more money. I know I'm getting more experience, I think that's why the dream is if you can write for a magazine, they pay much more. That is a goal I have for myself.

[KW] One of my last questions for you, what do you think is a superpower that you have that has enabled you to hit the ground running and amass all these great clips in the last, less than a years?

[ER] I love the superpower thing. I don't know what it is. I'd be curious to what others thinks. I would imagine it has something to do with where I am in my own life. Just being older, being more confident, going through a lot has made it easier for me to care less about what I'm writing and just to speak my mind.

But I think, just in my personality in general, I'm usually a person that says their opinions because I've spent so much time abroad and working with other cultures, I try to be careful with the words I choose and maybe that comes out in my writing. Usually what I say has more than one meaning, and it's only a certain person that could catch that.

[KW] Well thank you very much. I'm honored that I could be one of the ones to catch that and I know that when I read your Metropolitan piece, I was truly inspired by it. I welcome you back anytime and I wish you the best and best of luck.

[ER] Thank you so much. This has been wonderful. And thank you for telling me that I have super sentence power. I'm going to remember that forever.

[KW] You're welcome back anytime. And I'm inspired by what you've done so far and I'm looking forward to what you will do in the future. I know you're working on a memoir, so when you get that published you can come back right here to Behind the Prose.

[ER] Absolutely thank you so much for having me.

[KW] Thank you Elana Rabinowitz.

And that brings us to another end of Behind the Prose, episode 34. On deck coming up I have an interview with Judith Ortiz Cofer; and we're gonna follow up with Erik Deckers, and I'm reading Kim Brooks novel The Houseguest. It's coming out on April 12, I think, so make sure you are ready to go to Barnes and Noble or wherever you get your books from and pick that up. Check out the show page. I encourage you to read Elana's work. It's inspiring and enlightening.

Tweet me @behindtheprose or sign up for our email newsletter because there's gonna be some give aways coming up. But and thanks for rocking with me again and until next time, listen, learn, and write.

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