

# For Writers

BY JENNI SCHAEFER, AUTHOR OF *ALMOST ANOREXIC*, *LIFE WITHOUT ED*, AND *GOODBYE ED, HELLO ME*

I never wanted to be a writer. That is, as a child, I never wanted to write. I didn't like writing, and I wasn't a big fan of reading either. In fact, I distinctly remember looking at books thinking, "Who in the world would ever want to write something like that?" I imagined that the book writing process would be completely tedious and boring.

Throughout school, when English teachers encouraged me to pursue writing (Thanks, Ms. Carwile!), I turned to science and math instead. I preferred chemistry, algebra, and related subjects, because assignments in these classes seemed to be more clear-cut and defined, often with one correct answer—a specific number or combination of numbers. I could usually figure out that answer, and I liked that.

I did not like English class with its writing assignments that had a wide array of answers with all kinds of possibilities. Instead of finding "the" answer, I had to process material, formulate my own thoughts, and speak my mind. This was risky, and at the time, I didn't enjoy it at all. So, in college, I pursued a biochemistry degree where any writing that I did was confined to laboratory reports. I graduated and planned to enter medical school.

That's when my plans changed. Writing has been a calling. I didn't want to be a writer. I didn't pursue it, but writing found me anyway. For that, I am deeply grateful.

I took a one-year deferral from entering medical school and ended up in treatment for my eating disorder. Throughout the recovery process, I wrote detailed notes in journals during appointments with my treatment team. I even took notes in group therapy, which, looking back, I can see how this might have worried my group members!

Eventually, I wanted to help other people who struggled with eating disorders, so I decided to turn my journal entries into a book (*Life Without Ed*). I was surprised to discover that I enjoyed the writing process. Unlike what I had imagined, writing a book was not boring but exciting. Sure, the editing process seemed a bit tedious at times, but the overall experience was that I came alive as the words poured out of my pen onto the page.

The process of writing *Life Without Ed* was unlike anything I had done before. I learned that I could speak my truth on paper even when I couldn't do it in my everyday life. I also discovered that I liked writing. No, I loved it. (I love reading now, too.)

I will never stop writing. Being recovered means that I am healthy enough and in the right frame of mind to write about anything at all. I don't have to write just about eating disorders and recovery. I can turn day-to-day life into a blog or interesting dating experiences into a book. (I warned my fiancé early on that he would end up in a book someday!)

MENTORING CAN BE VERY HELPFUL IN GROWING AS A WRITER! ASK SOMEONE YOU KNOW FOR GUIDANCE.

*Since I write articles, books, and songs, I wanted to find a mentor who could guide me in all areas. I chose RobSimbeck.com, and he said yes! Rob is an extremely gifted writer. He actually wrote the bio on my website.*

I have connected with people of all ages—from all over the world—who want to write and who have asked me about the process. I will share some of my ideas here.

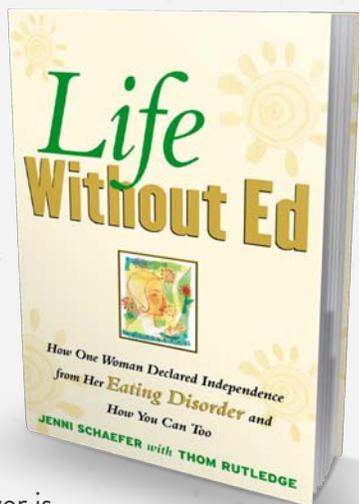
One key to being a writer is to write (and often). The more I write on a regular basis, the easier and more fun it becomes. I encourage you to write about anything and everything.

When you have an interesting idea or thought, write it down before you lose it forever. Some writers I know carry little notebooks with them everywhere they go. I prefer to write just on whatever is

nearest to me at the time that an idea arises—sometimes it is my journal, but more likely, it is a napkin or the back of a receipt. Lately, I have been taking more and more notes on my iPhone. But don't worry about capturing every idea. Sometimes, you just need to live! I have discovered that the good ideas will rise to the surface regardless.

Another key to writing for me has been reading. I read books, blogs, and publications of all kinds. If you are serious about being a writer, start reading, too.

Since many of you have asked me specifically about the book publishing process, I will share my journey below. I know a lot of published authors, and no one's path looks the same. Here are answers to some common questions:



## How did you get your first book published?

1. I spent several months writing a detailed book proposal. (I wrote the book proposal before I finished writing the book.) To write my proposal, I used Jeff Herman's book, *Write the Perfect Book Proposal*.
2. I looked for literary agents who might be interested in my work by searching PublishersMarketplace.com and by using Jeff Herman's book, *Guide to To Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents*.
3. I sent a brief one-page query letter to many agents describing my book and asking them if they would like to see my book proposal. (Jeff Herman's books talk about how to write a query letter.) I did not send the book proposal initially—I just mailed the query letter.
4. I sent my book proposal to only those literary agents who requested it. From there, I signed with an agent who was interested. My agent found my publisher. (Important note: A reputable literary agent will not ask for money up front. An agent only gets paid if he or she secures a book deal, usually receiving 15% of an author's earnings. It is always a good idea to ask an attorney to review a contract before signing.)

## Was finding a literary agent and publisher easy?

1. No, I received over fifty rejection letters from literary agents, including one from my current literary agency! They were not interested in my first book, *Life Without Ed*, but they really wanted to work with me on my second, *Goodbye Ed, Hello Me*. (Watch my speaker's reel video at [YouTube.com/JenniSchaefer](https://www.youtube.com/JenniSchaefer) to see the actual rejection letters and to learn more about this experience.)

2. My agent for *Life Without Ed* had a difficult time finding a publisher who believed in the “Ed” idea. He was rejected time and time again.

3. I didn’t quit. My agents never quit. And I was able to get two book deals via this process.

### What advice would you give to an aspiring author?

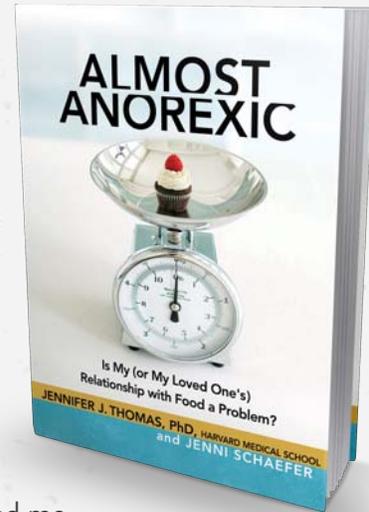
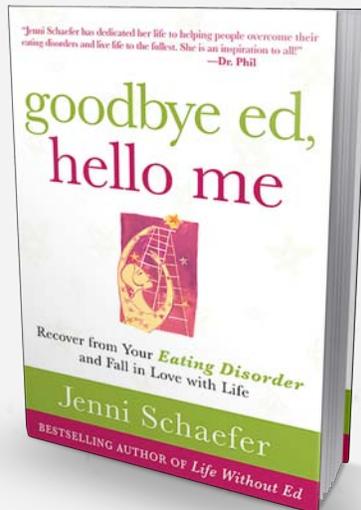
You have a unique voice, and your message is important to share. If you have a difficult time finding a publisher, consider self-publishing, which many people actually prefer.

Consider posting your work on a website or blog. There are people out there who will enjoy your writing style and who need to read what you have to say.

You are a writer if you write. (You do not have to get something published to be a writer.) Keep writing and believe in yourself. I look forward to reading your work.

### Additional resource:

BookChic is a full-service content development consulting company founded by Michele Matrisciani. Michele is the first editor who believed in *Life Without Ed*. Without Michele, my first book might have never been published! Visit [www.bookchic.net/author.cfm](http://www.bookchic.net/author.cfm).



My third book, *Almost Anorexic* was a very unique experience. Harvard Health Publications actually contacted me and asked if I wanted to coauthor the book. I know of other instances where writers have been approached by publishers to write books. An interesting and popular blog has been known to attract publishers and literary agents.

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*Jenni Schaefer is a singer/songwriter, speaker, and author of Life Without Ed and Goodbye Ed, Hello Me. She is the co-author of Almost Anorexic: Is My (or My Loved One's) Relationship with Food a Problem? (released by Harvard Health Publications and Hazelden). For further resources as well as information about Jenni's work, visit [JenniSchaefer.com](http://JenniSchaefer.com). Connect with her at [Twitter.com/JenniSchaefer](https://twitter.com/JenniSchaefer) and [Facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd](https://facebook.com/LifeWithoutEd).*

*Feel free to post short pieces of your writing on Jenni's Facebook page. She enjoys reading your work and sharing it with others. Also, check out the Dream Big submissions on her website. Submit your story of triumph over adversity for a possible feature on her blog!*