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The Romanov Imperial family of Russia, 1893

Genetic Genealogy Revisited

More Questions You May Have Been Afraid to Ask...

by Stephen P. Morse

ing the book to your relatives and extended family, and your purpose will likely be to pass down information to future generations. Your qualifications are the years you have spent searching for your ancestors. But if you have loftier ambitions, such as a book you plan to sell to the genealogical community or the larger public, then you will need to think more carefully about how you will answer these questions. Use this simple formula: So what? Who cares? Who am I? If you can answer these questions then you are well on your way.

I self-published my first book, *Three Slovak Women*, in 2001. I made the decision to go it on my own after blindly feeling my way through the publishing game of querying agents and small publishers. One small publisher asked if I would be willing to turn my book into fiction instead of non-fiction because he believed a fictional account would sell much better. I said, "No." My book was a tribute to my grandmother and my mother, and I wanted to tell their stories as they happened. He ended up publishing an e-book version that was distributed on diskette (yes, diskette—this was before CDs and other popular digital media). But, by offering only an e-book, I realized I was missing out on a larger audience, so I decided to find a press to print a soft-cover version of the book. I used the same publisher to produce a soft-cover version of my second book, *Baba's Kitchen: Slovak & Rusyn Family Recipes and Traditions*. For both of these books I identified my potential audience (and book buyers) as mostly fellow Slovaks, and not a big enough market for a mainstream publisher. Therefore, the self-publishing route seemed like the way to go.

2. Do Your Homework

Once you have identified your audience and purpose, you should start researching publishing options. Try a Google search <www.google.com> or use your favorite search engine. You should also visit your local bookstore and see which books are on the shelf in the section where you think your book might be placed and note the publishers of those titles. You can also do this by searching online at Amazon.com <www.amazon.com>, Barnes & Noble <www.barnesandnoble.com>, or Borders <www.borders.com>. Pick up a copy of the *Writer's Market* <www.writersmarket.com>, published yearly by Writer's Digest. Writing magazines such as *Writer's Journal*, *The Writer*, and *Writer's Digest* often run articles on self-publishing, as well as advertisements for traditional and print-on-demand (POD) publishers. POD is a process by which you provide the company with a digital file of your book, and they will turn it into the final product. As the name suggests, POD allows you to order as many copies (from one to hundreds) of your book as you need, when you

If you are still in the writing stage, you will want to be sure to create an outline so you have an idea of how many pages, number of chapters, whether or not you will be including photographs, footnotes, references, appendixes, an index, etc.

need them. It can often be more economical than using a traditional printer that will usually require a minimum order, and the price of the book is usually based on how many copies you order. The more copies you order the cheaper per book price. With POD, the price is set, and you can go back as often as you like to order as many or few copies of the book as needed. Some services, such as Smashwords <www.smashwords.com>, let you set your own price, and you can even produce free downloadable e-books. Many companies also provide a way for others to order the book directly from them, eliminating the work of potential buyers to go through you. Some even offer marketing and promotion/book placement packages. Always

ask what these packages include before spending money on them to be sure that the places you want to sell your books will work with POD publishers.

There are other aspects you must research. If you plan to sell your book, you will need an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and bar code. Some publishing houses include fees to do this for you, although you can obtain them yourself by visiting Bowker's Identifier Services <www.bowker.com/index.php/identifier-services>. A block of ten ISBNs can be purchased for under \$250. It is better to buy these in bulk because a single ISBN will cost you \$125, and you will need a new ISBN for each form of the book: print, e-book, audio, new editions, as well as any future books you may decide to write. You can purchase International Article Number (EAN) Bar Codes for each ISBN for \$25 on an as-needed basis for your print editions. If you are looking at a publishing package, ask what it includes. Always read the fine print. Are you required to sign a contract? Will they register the copyright with the Library of Congress? How much of an author's discount do they offer? Other questions important to ask are, "What happens if the publisher goes out of business or is bought out by another entity?" "Will your agreement still be valid?" "Will you have access to formatted files, your online account, etc.?"

3. Have a Plan

If you are still in the writing stage, you will want to be sure to create an outline so you have an idea of how many pages, number of chapters, whether or not you will be including photographs, footnotes, references, appendixes, an index, etc. What is your vision for the book? Will it be a small book containing a pedigree chart, a few photographs and some family stories? Will it be a scrapbook style? Hard or soft cover? Spiral or perfect bound? Are you interested in doing just an electronic (e-book) or both a print and a digital version? Knowing what your final goal is helps in laying out the process to making it happen. Some of this may be

reflected in your budget, but if you cannot afford that big coffee-style book you may need to consider scaling down your project to get the look you want. Perhaps if having all of your family lines in one book is your goal then you may have to rethink the vision that matches the budget.

4. Prepare a budget

If you are just printing a few copies of your family history for family members the cost may not be a concern. But, if you are looking to make your books available for purchase outside your inner circle, or you plan to sell copies on a large scale, then you need to do a bit of math. In fact, you will want to treat your publishing endeavor like a business (spreadsheets and all!). How much are you prepared to spend to publish your book? This is where steps two and three can guide you. Even if you are selecting a POD service, you still want to have a handle on what it costs to produce each copy of the book and how much you will earn after the publisher/service takes its cut.

Full color covers and images inside the book will add to the cost. If you are going with a printer, what is their minimum order for you to get a discount? If the books are not printed in the town where you live, how much will the freight costs be to have your books shipped to you? Will there be any other hidden costs you need to be aware of? How much are you willing to spend on marketing your book (publishing houses usually do not do any marketing unless you pay for it in pre-determined packages). You do not want to find yourself in debt or have your credit cards maxed out for books that may sit for months or years in your basement or garage. Also, if you are doing your own selling, you need to take account of sales tax requirements (for on and offline sales), tax licenses needed for conferences, book fairs, etc. (each state is different), and other filing requirements for federal, state, and local taxes. In addition, you will need a method to keep track of how many books you sell and how much profit you are earning per copy. I find myself mathematically challenged, so I use spreadsheet software and automated processes whenever possible to keep track of my own book sales.

5. Set Some Goals

Knowing what your final goal is helps you to have a roadmap for the publishing process. Having an ultimate goal of publishing a narrative for distribution to family members only is very different from that of publishing a book to market to the public. You may need to set yourself smaller goals along the way. For example, "by June 30th I will have a full draft of my book ready for the

The only way to inform others about your book is to market, market, market! Remember, you are your best salesperson. If you are not out there telling people about your book, you should not expect anyone else to do so.

proofreader," or "I will have my book ready to upload or take to the printer no later than October 1."

Your goals may be determined or influenced by your budget. Be certain that your vision or goals match your budget (see step four above). If they do not, then you need to go back and re-evaluate. You should also consider the time-frame it will take to get the book published. If you are publishing e-books, the time may be a lot shorter. If you want to have your book out and ready for distribution or purchase in time for the holidays or other special event (family reunion, major genealogy conference, etc.) you need to factor in time not only for production, but for marketing as well. This may be several

months or even up to a year depending on how much time you have available to devote to marketing (see step six below). Get out your calendar and take into account holidays, vacations, etc.

6. Get the Word Out

The only way to inform others about your book is to market, market, market! Remember, you are your best salesperson. If you are not out there telling people about your book, you should not expect anyone else to do so. Marketing can take many forms. You will definitely want to create a website either for yourself or for the book, or sometimes both. You may also consider writing a blog via Blogger <www.blogger.com> or WordPress.com <www.wordpress.com>. Do not underestimate the power of social networking sites such as Facebook <www.facebook.com> and Twitter <www.twitter.com>. All of these online tools are great methods for marketing your book for free.

Marketing may also involve placing advertisements in print media, and cold calling people or visiting places that might be interested (libraries, bookstores, social organizations, etc.). You may want to sell your book at conferences or book fairs. You should also submit your book to newspapers, magazines, society newsletters, and fellow colleagues for review. Ask readers who have purchased your book online through Amazon.com <www.amazon.com> or Barnes & Noble <www.barnesandnoble.com> to write an online review. Members of the International Society of Family History Writers and Editors (ISFHWE) can take advantage of their Publication Promotion Project <www.isfhwe.org>. I use a variety of methods to promote my books, including my website <www.lisaalzo.com>, blog <www.theaccidentalgenealogist.com>, Facebook <www.facebook.com>, Twitter <www.twitter.com>, the ISFHWE project, and mentions in my articles, courses, and lectures. Reviews of my books have appeared both online and in various print media. They work. I always see a spike in sales after a review has appeared somewhere.

7. Ask for Help

Self-publishing often takes the form of a small business. You are no longer just a writer, but often your own public relations person, sales and marketing director, web designer, social media coordinator, accountant, order processor, and sometimes even distributor and shipper. This can often be overwhelming, and you may find you need some help. One aspect you should ask for assistance with is editing. Consider hiring a freelance editor and/or proofreader (someone other than you). Perhaps you can find a colleague through APG who offers these services. This is one mistake I made early on in the process—not getting someone to read the book before I published it. I found a number of typos and other errors. I was able to change them in the next edition, but I was not happy that my product went out with errors. If you are not tech savvy, perhaps you will want to hire someone to build a website for you or walk you through online sales and using PayPal <www.paypal.com>. Many writers are now producing Vooks (a Vook blends your favorite book with high-quality engaging video to create one complete story), and even building apps for their titles for smartphones/iPhones. If you do not have experience with programming or other technical skills, you may want to hire someone for these tasks. The same goes for your taxes—perhaps you will need an accountant or tax preparer. Some authors may also want to hire a graphic designer, or someone to handle marketing and public relations, or shipping and distribution.

Credibility Concerns

There are those who still look down on self-published authors, or think that self-published books are of a lesser quality than those produced from the agent-publisher route. I disagree. I have read some books in the mainstream that I did not think were as good as similar books that were self-published. Self-publishing provides people with solid writing skills and marketing know-how to get their voices heard.

When I started out with my books many years ago, I never imagined I would sell as many copies as I have to date. *Three Slovak Women* is currently in its eleventh printing and *Baba's Kitchen* is in its tenth. While I have not made enough money to quit my day job, I have reached a much larger audience than I ever anticipated and am rewarded every time someone comes up to me at a conference or contacts me to tell me how much they enjoyed *Three Slovak Women* or how they were so happy to have the recipes included in *Baba's Kitchen*. And best of all, I have kept the copyright, as well as the control over how and where my books are distributed.

Summary

Make no mistake: Self-publishing is not for the faint of heart. It may sound easy, but there is much to consider before you take the plunge. It requires a commitment of time, money, and initial

legwork to make sure you are getting the right deal and getting the best product for your investment. However, if you are willing to take a risk, the possibilities for success are endless and sometimes the rewards can even be much greater than you ever expected.

For Further Reading

Articles

- "Be Proactive in Promoting Your Writing," by Wallace Wyss, *Writer's Journal* 29, no. 2 (March-April 2010): 44-45.
- "I Don't Think We're in Kansas Anymore: A Self-Publishing Primer," by Rob Loughran, *Writer's Journal* 29, no. 2 (March-April 2010): 19-24.
- "The Pitfalls of Using Self-Publishing Book Packages," by Carla King, *Mediashift*, 25 March 2010, <www.pbs.org/mediashift/2010/03/the-pitfalls-of-using-self-publishing-book-packages084.html>, accessed on 24 July 2010.
- The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*, 5th Edition. By Marilyn Ross and Sue Collier. Writer's Digest Books, 2010.
- "Thirteen Steps to Write and Publish a Free Ebook In Thirteen Hours" by Ali Hale, ProBlogger, 16 September 2009, posted by Darren Rowse <www.problogger.net/archives/2009/09/16/thirteen-steps-to-write-and-publish-a-free-ebook-in-thirteen-hours/>, accessed on 19 August 2010.

Books

- What Writers Need to Know About Publishing*. By Jerry D. Simmons, 2005. Order online from <www.writersreaders.com>.
- Self-Publishing for Dummies*. By Jason R. Rich. Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey 2006.

Self-Publishing Resources

- Amazon Author Central <<https://authorcentral.amazon.com>>
- Barnes & Noble <www.barnesandnoble.com>
- Blurb <www.blurb.com>
- BookSurge <www.booksurge.com>
- Bowker's Identifier Services <www.bowker.com/index.php/identifier-services>
- Lulu <www.lulu.com>
- PayPal <www.paypal.com>
- Scribd <www.scribd.com>
- Smashwords <www.smashwords.com>
- Writer's Digest <www.writersdigest.com>
- WritersMarket.com <www.writersmarket.com>

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