

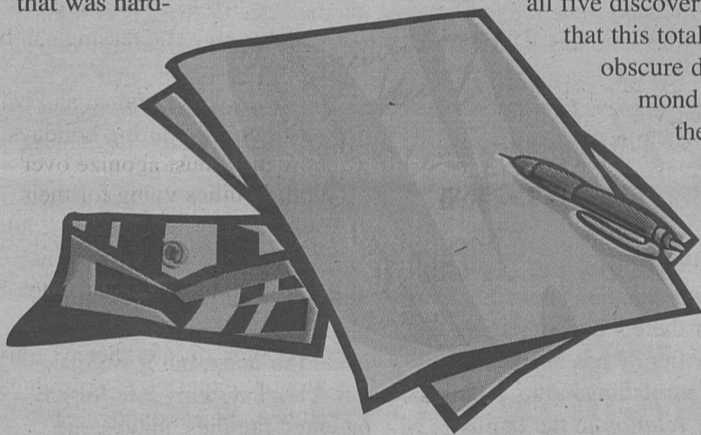
Views: Embracing Rejection

I'm in the process of being rejected. Don't you just hate that? On the other hand, it could be worse. At least I'm not being rejected by a sweetie ... yet. Do I sound a little wary? Let's put it this way. Rejection is not on my top-ten list of best responses to my heart's desires. This particular rejection is related to the world of (arghh) publishing.

I just finished writing a memoir about lesbian feminism in the Burlington women's community back in the 1970s. I have spent a lot of years on this project, which meant I had to *not* reject myself in order to finish it. And let me tell you, that was hard-

**crow
cohen**

and sample chapters in the envelopes and got over my full-blown anxiety attack, and before I heard from this first round of agents, I entertained grandiose fantasies of all five discovering that this totally obscure diamond in the



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ass work. It wasn't the writing that I sweated and strained over. The writing was the easy part because writing is not only fun for me, it's a bit of a compulsion. It was the discipline around the writing – the effort to set aside the time, the negative self-talk (*This, Crowsky, is a bunch of bullshit!* etc.), the negative moods, the just plain laziness – that was the hard part. I tend to be a little hippie around the edges. My idea of a good time is to sit by the lake and stare a lot.

But I managed to come up with around 250 pages after three or four drafts, and now it's time. To send it out. To be rejected. Oh, after I stuffed all the necessary inquiries, outlines

rough from Burlington, Vermont could make them loads of money so who would I choose to represent me as I was catapulted to fame on the Oprah Winfrey Show?

I did not take my writer friends' advice, which was to have five more addressed envelopes on my desk after the first five passed me up. "Don't skip a beat. Don't dwell on it. Shrug your shoulders and move on," they said. But they forgot to tell me that fancy literary agencies from Madison Ave. send *mean* form letters: We're not *enthusiastic* enough about your work. Don't bother sending it on to another agent at the agency. We would have passed it on if we thought there'd be

any takers. We receive 4000 submissions a month – now just who the hell do you think you are? (Not exact quotes.)

The one letter I got that actually mentioned my book by name said something honest, which came as a relief. "The companies we represent are only interested in people who have major media attention." Do I honestly believe that a memoir about a lesbian feminist community in some small town in northern New England is going to be happily digested by the bowels of the patriarchy? Not likely.

Now what? Like with any rejection my job is to learn from it – to change tactics or to simply keep doing the same thing with a thicker skin. My job is to laugh about it, or get angry enough to proclaim it's *their* loss. (*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* was rejected 100 times. I love those kinds of stories.) Most of all, my job is to continue to believe that there are plenty of folks who would enjoy my take on dykes in the 1970s because it was a major act of healing for me to embrace my courage and foibles during my coming out process.

So why bother with rejection? Why not just pat myself on my back for a job well done, share the book with a few of my friends and put it behind me? Because rejections are the stuff of life. They make us grow. They spur us on to take more risks. They fuel determination. They build character. (Don't you just hate that?) They push us to either believe in ourselves or shrivel up and fade away.

Affirming myself as a lesbian for the past 27 years in the face of society's rejection has ironically made me a very happy woman today. Surely I can withstand a few more discouraging months. Wish me luck.▼

Crow Cohen is a writer, mother, grandmother, and self-proclaimed lesbian revolutionary who lives in Burlington.



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