

It only takes a nugget to find your niche; how to be a freelance writer

By Patricia Barrett

One of the keys to constructing a successful freelance writing career is to find a niche.

Matlock author Doreen Pendgracs did just that and is now a well-known and sought-after expert on chocolate tourism.

Her unique combination of cocoa and worldwide travel was a subject untapped by travel writers.

"If we're talking about how to be a professional writer, you've got to find your niche," said Pendgracs, who worked in the corporate world until she embarked on a freelance writing career in 1993.

After writing for various publications, such as *Canadian Geographic*, *CAA Magazine*, *Profit* magazine and *Groups Today*, Pendgracs turned her talents to full-length books.

It was by chance that she found her writing niche in fine chocolate. While on vacation in the Caribbean, she visited a cocoa plantation, which sparked the idea of connecting chocolate lovers to the literal roots of cocoa production and the people who grow it.

"I fell into it," she said. "And that's what I want people to think about if they are on holiday or are an aspiring writer: you never know where your next project's going to come from. That seed was planted in January of '09 on that Dominican Republic farm ... then I realized I wanted to write a book on chocolate."

In 2013, she published *Chocolatour: A Quest for the World's Best Chocolate, Volume 1*, combining her love of travel and storytelling with in-depth knowledge of the best cocoa producers and manufacturers around the world.

Her research took her on globe-trotting adventures. She visited Belgium, France, Switzerland, Holland, Spain, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Costa Rica and England, to name a few.

England is a country one would not normally associate with high quality chocolate, but Pendgracs discovered that a "chocolate revolution" had bro-

ken out.

"They actually protested against the old-style British chocolate, which was far too sweet. Think of Cadbury or Quality Street, those types of chocolate where sugar is the No. 1 ingredient. When we're eating good chocolate, we know that cocoa or cocoa mass or cocoa liquor ... should be your No. 1 ingredient. New chocolate-makers in the U.K. are making some of the best chocolate in the world."

For each country, Pendgracs focused on what was unique as far as cocoa went and then dug deeper to find something quirky or just plain fascinating about the people behind the bean or the finished product.

Writers should focus on finding a small detail and then turning it into an entertaining story.

"You build a story around a nugget," she said. "You take a nugget and you nourish it and embellish it. You research it. You fuel it and it grows into a chapter or it grows into an overall theme."

Pendgracs said it's vital for writers to know the market before launching into a project.

"I was going to write a book about



EXPRESS PHOTO COURTESY OF DOREEN PENDGRACS

Doreen Pendgracs travels the world learning the art of fine chocolate as she writes the second volume of *Chocolatour*.

wine travel because I really love wine. But I researched the market and found [it] was saturated."

her break into magazine writing after she left her corporate job.

Finding gaps in the market helped

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Correction

Staff

In the article "#BelieveInitiative tour makes a stop in Fisher Branch" published in the March 23 *Express Weekly News*, the reporter's name should have said by Natasha Tersigni and Rozanne Nevakshonoff with photo credit to Tekla Vandersteen, owner/operator of Wild Country Photography.

The *Express* apologizes for the error.

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