

THE ROAD TO SELF PUBLISHING FRED NORMANDALE

I'm from a fishing industry background and grew up in the *Bottom End* of Scarborough among some wonderful characters. My childhood and teenage years were unique. On leaving school I went to sea on local vessels and spent the next twenty-five years fishing from this historic port on various vessels, fishing in the company of these larger than life men.

Sadly these fishers are a dying breed, so when I came ashore in the early 1990s to concentrate on managing the numerous vessels I had become involved in, I said to my wife Dorothy, "someone should write about the old fishermen, their way of life and sense of humour. If not, they will have lived and died and their stories would die with them".

Without hesitation she replied, "Get on with it then".

I thought for a while about this then took up the challenge. I bought a small AppleMac laptop and began writing and compiling all the anecdotes and moving, humorous and informative tales until my collection was one of seventy or eighty short stories. These ranged from a paragraph to two or three pages in length. At this point I was recording the stories and not knowing what to do with them.

One day Dorothy, returning from a visit to the library, gave me a leaflet from *The Arvon Foundation* at Lumb Bank, near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, offering a five-day, residential writing course. Here was an opportunity to *learn to write*.

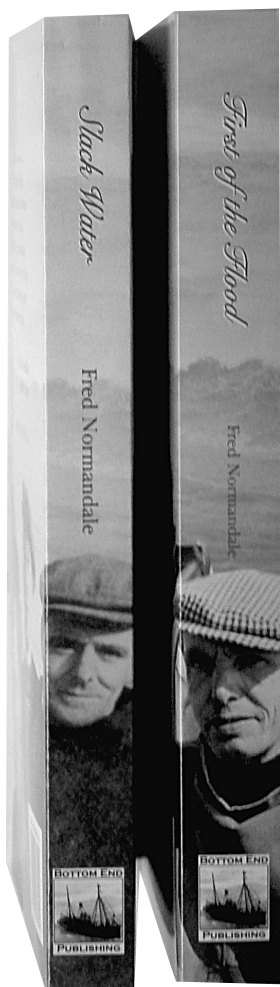
I spent an early summer period at this wonderful establishment and it was as if a light had been switched on in my head. With encouragement from the resident tutor of the week, Nicholas Royle, I realised I could introduce these characters as I wrote my own story about growing up in this wonderful environment.

After about ten years of on and off scribing, I eventually completed *First of the Flood*. I thought, "Yes", I've done it. I'll just find an agent then get the work published. How naive was I? It's a jungle out there. With the assistance of a current *Writers' Yearbook*, I singled out the agent I wanted to honour with my work. A tardy, unhelpful rejection came a little over three weeks later. When this had happened about a dozen times, and sometimes no reply at all, I decided to go directly to the publishers.

This did seem a more fruitful avenue and I sent out several sections of manuscript out having made contact. This avenue became a cul-de-sac. My work was parochial. The big players were looking for stuff that would make the international markets.

I was stymied. My sister Janet suggested *self publishing*. Not the vanity press where you pay to see your work in print, but a real print job by a printing and publishing company. She knew someone at *York Publishing Services* and arranged an appointment for me to see Dave Mercer at YPS.

This experience was wonderful after what had become three years of rejection. Dave helped me through the pitfalls of barcodes, ISBNs and copyright, all the things an aspiring author knows nothing of.



Barry Perks, the designer, turned my idea for a cover into a terrific work of art, almost bringing my characters back to life.

I ordered 1000 copies, as this was the most cost-effective number to print, and I didn't think I'd be able to sell more than this amount. I hoped to sell half and break even.

It was my good fortune to launch *First of the Flood* in late October 2002. I had a grand 'book launch' in my local pub, inviting the Mayor and Consort. A splendid seafood (what else) buffet for family, the locals and the characters still around and featuring in the book was picked clean. There was a complimentary copy of the book for each.

Reviews were essential and I was fortunate to get local and regional newspapers interested and received an excellent write up in the national *Fishing News*. This gave me an opportunity to sell copies retail and recover postage.

The Christmas market was looming. I hawked copies to all the local bookshops and newsagents. Most were very friendly and helpful, though some haggled over discounts or required copies to be sent to their regional distributor so they could be sent back, at my expense. I was gob smacked when my entire stock sold in five weeks.

Christmas was almost upon us when the second 1000 were produced, but these too went within eight months.

There are now only a few remaining of the third edition of 1000.

The feedback from readers was fantastic. People stopped me in the street or rang up at home to say how much they'd enjoyed the tale and asked, "when are you doing another?"

Book two, *Slack Water*, was launched, also in the *Leeds Arms*, in November 2004, via the same route, and with confidence I ordered 2000 copies. More than half have gone and though it's always slower after Christmas, the books are still selling. Book one sold more copies on the back of the new volume.

The moral of this tale is, if you are confident you have a good product and cannot find your way through the mine field that is publishing, take your work to the market place yourself. You'll have to work hard to sell your work and there's no publicity machine other than your own efforts, but by this route you *will* see your work in print. It is unlikely, though not impossible, that you'll get rich but you could make a modest profit and, as in my case, have the satisfaction of recording my social history for future generations. Watch this space for book three.

Fred Normandale
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