

Late Bloomers: Cynthia Surrisi on launching her writing career:

Late Bloomers defy age stereotypes and help show us the way to tap into our creativity using life experience, energy and positive attitudes.

“Creativity keeps us fresh, keeps us alive, keeps us moving forward.”

– Rollo May, psychotherapist and author of *Courage to Create*

I was fortunately born with an indomitable creative spirit. I believe we all are. Mine has survived every attempt to douse it. By that I mean long days, months, and years of attention to what can be the dry details of legal contract negotiations at work; house management, billing paying, and other domestic matters at home; personal losses, and far too many air miles of business travel.

But these years were also enriched by flourishing children, wonderful relationships, successes of many kinds, and warm sun on my face.

What I didn't have all those years were hours to dedicate to creative writing, which I longed to do. I have a BFA, a law degree, and finally now, an MFA. While technically I can say I retired from law, I really just stopped doing it in favor of returning to a more creative life.

Because I learn best in a structured environment, and I felt I had a relatively short horizon to really learn to write, I entered an MFA program. I chose the low-residency, Vermont College of Fine Arts and it worked splendidly for me.

I'm a hard worker and an over achiever. I gave it all the attention it demanded and more. I thoroughly enjoyed being back in graduate school. Within weeks of getting my MFA I got a book deal that led to a three book, middle grade mystery series and a picture book.

Perhaps because I knew I wasn't seeking a thirty-year, fifty-book writing career, and I never fancied myself chasing the Newbery Award, I have not felt pressured by my late start. Don't get me wrong, I'm acutely aware that a late-blooming career naturally has limitations. It takes a good long while to write the books, and they are two years from contract to publication on average. But I have a greater ease about it, I think.

C.M. Surrisi

author and teacher :: cmsurrisi.com

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When I get feedback from my editor or agent that something needs to change, I'm all about the change. Not because I'm not invested in principle, but because I trust their judgment. If they don't like one book, I'll come up with another and another.

There are some obstacles to navigating this business as an older adult. I'm sixty-nine. I was fifty-seven when I first joined the Society for Children's Writers and Illustrators, sixty-four when I started the MFA program; and sixty-six when my first middle grade mystery was published.

Four books and three years later, I've done book launches, library conferences, book festivals, writer's conferences, blog tours, maintained two critique groups, and taught at the university level. I've passed on many opportunities to promote the books because I am wearied by the promotional aspects of the business. I would rather spend the time writing new things. I have to make hard choices about where to put my energy these days.

Frankly, I don't know how long this will last. I'm not worried about it either. Because I've written three mysteries it has earned me membership in the Mystery Writer of America and the Sisters in Crime. I'm now enticed by writing adult cozies. You see, there goes that indomitable creative spirit with a mind of its own.

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