

5-MINUTE MEMOIR

A Maverick Guide to Persistence

BY ROBERT W. BONE

Shortly after my family and I moved to Hawaii in 1971, I began to think about writing a serious travel guidebook to the island state.

No such book then existed. At the time I was a newspaper reporter, but had experience with guidebooks, having worked in Europe for Temple Fielding, then considered the top American writer in that field.

In Honolulu I ran into an executive at Rand McNally, who took an interest in my idea. Soon after he returned to his Chicago headquarters, I received a book contract from Rand McNally and an advance of \$3,000 against royalties.

The contract called for the first half to be finished in six months—by the end of January 1974. To meet that goal, I went on part time at the paper while researching tourism subjects on Oahu and flying frequently to the outer islands in the state.

After turning in the first portion of the manuscript, I received a phone call from Sylvia McNair, a highly respected editor at Rand McNally. She did not like the very personal—and often critical—approach I had taken with the project.

“Sadly, it is simply not a Rand McNally kind of book,” she said. She went on to say that I could either a) revise the text to reflect their more conventional style, or b) cancel the contract, keep the advance and take my project to another publisher.

I chose the second option. I’d found Rand McNally quickly enough—surely I could find another publisher in jig time.

As it turned out, I was wrong.

I went full time back at the newspaper, and spent pretty much the rest of my waking hours over the next year writing to more than 100 publishers and receiving just as many rejections—though many wished me good luck.

In my proposals, I called the manuscript *A Consumer Guide to Hawaii*. But a Dec. 6, 1974, rejection letter from the editor of Quadrangle Books, The New York Times Company’s book publishing arm, inadvertently gave me a better title.

“I admire very much your effort to write a book that is frank and honest revealing the blemishes as well as the beauty marks. I think that is the way all guidebooks should be written, though I doubt they ever will.”

The editor, Jonathan Segal, said he doubted the industry would embrace “a maverick book on Hawaii.”

Later, I imagined his name to be *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, the title of the inspirational book by Richard Bach, whose life lessons might be applied to my own aspirations. And I began calling my own book the *Maverick Guide to Hawaii*.

A year and a half after my divorce from Rand McNally, I received a letter from Pelican Publishing Co. in New Orleans

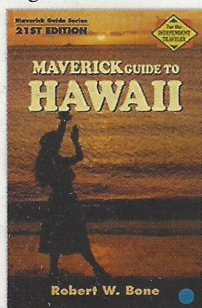


saying they’d like to explore the idea. Pelican eventually sent me a contract as well as a small advance, and the book was published in 1976.

The Hawaii guidebook remained in print through 21 revised editions until 2002, when the internet changed the travel guide picture. In that time, it also led to my writing two more Maverick guides for Pelican (on Australia and New Zealand), plus a book on Alaska and Canada’s Yukon Territory for William Morrow and Co. All of this was supplemented by freelancing, with travel articles and photos sold to dozens of publications.

Being a maverick means trusting your gut, remaining persistent and, above all, telling the story *you* want to tell. In my experience, that’s a darn good way to approach a successful writing career.

Robert W. Bone (robertbone.com) is the author of *Fire Bone! A Maverick Guide to a Life in Journalism*.



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