

Hi,

Sharon Kurtz and I first met at the Ultimate Travel Writer's Workshop in Austin, Texas in 2018.

I couldn't have been more impressed with her positive upbeat attitude and determination to turn her dream of travel writing into a reality.

There's so much I can tell you about how and why she chooses to stay the course, even through the difficult times of COVID-19.

But I'm going to let Sharon tell her own inspirational story.

Warmest,
Noreen Kompanik
Pioneer, Travel Writer's Cafe

Act 2: It's Never Too Late to Dream a New Dream

By Sharon Kurtz in Dallas, Texas

Author C.S. Lewis once said, "You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

I am one of the lucky ones who has always been passionate about my work. Being self-employed and an artsy type who was also a good businesswoman, I thrived being my own boss. My travels inspired my stone wall art collection, and I took great pride in writing descriptive copy for my seasonal catalogs, which included a personal page in the front of the book titled "From the Artist." I poured my heart and soul into it, always striving to bring the words to life. As it turned out, this was helpful early training for my travel writing career.

I have an incurable case of wanderlust. As the years wore on, I found that I spent more time on the nuts and bolts of running a business and less time traveling to find inspiration for new designs. My enthusiasm was waning, and I needed a break.

I started leading tours a few times a year for a women's travel company to scratch my itch while keeping my business afloat. Once I tasted freedom from the daily grind, I couldn't put the genie back in the bottle. Our two sons were grown, and we had an empty nest. If not now, then when?

It was time to dream a new dream. With my husband's support, I sold my business. It was now time for my second act.



Tackling a new challenge

I formed a vague plan of starting a blog for women like me with a focus on travel hacks and packing tips. I thought a travel blog, coupled with leading tours, would go together like peas and carrots—that is until it dawned on me that I didn't have a clue how to do it.

Coming right out of the blocks, I discovered Great Escape Publishing and signed up for the "The Right Way to Travel" newsletter, which eventually led me to their online training program for bloggers. It languished, unopened on my computer, waiting for the right time.

In the spring of 2018, I received an email notification of an upcoming Ultimate Travel Writing Workshop in Austin, Texas. It grabbed my attention from the get-go, and I couldn't sign up fast enough. It was time for me to jump into travel writing with both feet, and I was more than ready.

The Workshop gave me the tools I needed, and a jump start to dipping my toes in the travel writing pond. Exciting, motivating, and bordering on overwhelming, there was so much information I couldn't take it all in—a bit like drinking water from the proverbial firehose. It was all good, though: They provided handouts and online refreshers to review when I got home and began to put the concepts and instruction into practice. Finding out about the opportunities to land press trips and enjoy travel perks was the icing on the cake. Getting my first query accepted and earning that first byline was unbelievably thrilling. I was gaining more confidence every day.

"Maybe I could become a travel writer," I thought.

Networking, Coaching, and Community

One of the bonuses of attending the workshop was finding my "travel tribe" through the Travel Writer's Café and making many new friends. Having the support of a community of travel writers who offer encouragement to new writers like me is invaluable. The roadmaps, bonus articles, and challenges provided by editors and industry experts help to keep me on track. I find myself going back again and again, revisiting the material when I get stuck.

Networking with fellow travel writers has been key, as well as getting involved in media networking sites, such as TravMedia and International Travel Writers & Photographers Alliance (ITWPA). Being invited to join professional writers' organizations like the International Food, Wine & Travel Association (IFWTWA) provides new ways to learn and grow. One-on-one coaching also helped me take what I learned at the workshop and develop better routines & practices, bringing my writing to a whole new level.

I'm excited to say that I now have 27 articles published in both online and print outlets, with six additional stories pending publication. I have reached out and received assistance from tourist and visitor bureaus who have extended free

accommodations, activities, and meals. Getting invited to participate in an all-expense-paid press trip was one of my goals, and I will achieve that soon with a "Discover Magical Salem" media trip to Salem, Massachusetts.

Like most of us, COVID-19 and current travel restrictions have temporarily interrupted my forward motion. Still, thanks to advice and encouragement from industry veterans, I'm trying to pivot, be flexible, and focus on local stories until I can return to the kind of travel writing I love most.

Calling on my Superpower

As a two-time cancer survivor who struggles with a chronic blood disorder, I have called upon my superpower many times to get me through some tough spots. I call it grit. I am determined, tenacious, and I don't give up. This character trait has helped me in my new travel writing career as well. When I set a goal for myself, I reach it by putting one foot in front of the other and always keeping my eye on the ball. Baby steps, yes, but always moving forward.

The advice I would give to new writers is to keep trying and don't give up. Find your superpower. Life doesn't always travel in a straight path; sometimes, there are twists, turns, and roadblocks. I have learned that it is never too late to change your life and tackle a new challenge. I can't wait to see where this travel writer's journey takes me.