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*WordThunder Publications*

For Immediate Release

## Would You Hire A Blind Woman To Design Your Web Site?

*“Yes, people actually pay this legally blind gal to design web sites.  
As I like to say, I have to design web sites because I don’t know enough about  
baseball to become an umpire.” –Sarah Mankowski*

Merritt Island, Florida.—Sarah Mankowski represents the forth generation born with cataracts in her family. She also inherited a burning desire for self-expression that could not be extinguished despite many obstacles. Now, in ***Liberation: One Writer’s Adventures and Misadventures on the Digital Playground***, she reveals how computers and the Internet provided mobility, expanding opportunities for expression. In this collection of essays Mankowski shares her enthusiasm for digital publishing and web design, drawn from experiences as writer, mentor, and owner/editor of WordThunder.com.

*To understand a technology, perhaps one should not only hear from the  
inventors, but also from the individuals whose lives are forever altered.*

“I’ve always known that it’s up to me to make the most of the tools at my disposal,” Mankowski says. “Even so, how could I dare to dream that one day I could sit at my desk and converse with the world?” Recognizing the potential of the Internet, Sarah taught herself web design and programming. She founded WordThunder.com, a resource site for writers publishing and promoting online. In 2003 *Writer’s Digest* named the site among the 101 best for writers.

“How privileged I am to live at this moment and in this place at a time when technology is ever expanding the realm of the possible, and in a country where a girl can start with nothing and still summon the tools to design her own destiny. May it always be so. May we always encourage innovation, creativity and hope.”

Autographed copies of ***Liberation: One Writer’s Adventures and Misadventures on the Digital Playground*** by Sarah Mankowski, \$9.95, 156 pages, ISBN: 0974526800 are available from <http://wordthunder.com/books/> Librarians, educators and non-profit organizations, please visit the publisher’s website for information about special discounts.

Download media kit at <http://wordthunder.com/books/> The kit includes links to sites designed by Sarah Mankowski.

**Look for Sarah at Book Expo America in Chicago, June 4, 5, 6.  
Please contact in advance to arrange an interview.**

WordThunder Publications  
P.O. Box 540931 Merritt Island FL 32954  
<http://wordthunder.com/books/>

# *The World According to Sarah*

Favorite Quotes From *Liberation* by Sarah Mankowski - ISBN: 0974526800 - \$9.95

## **On Technology**

- I have a problem with judging the potential of any technology based upon the behavior of the laziest and most disreputable among us.
- Technology is neither good nor evil. All such advancements have been created by humans. It is up to us to decide whether the use will be good or evil.

## **The Internet**

- When online, connivance equals the fewest possible clicks between the consumer and the goods, services or information being sought.
- Sure, this amazing network has allowed men and women to make millions. Perhaps, even more importantly, it has allowed obscure, creative minds to speak to the world.
- Some describe the Internet as one gigantic vanity press, where anybody with a website can publish whatever they please. So what? We have songs to sing, artwork to display and stories to tell. No longer are we willing to wait for gatekeepers to decree our work worthy of dissemination. No thanks. Life is too short. Some call it vanity. I call it liberation!

## **Creativity**

- Many innovative people walk among us. Sure, practically none will ever achieve fame or fortune; and yet, the act of satisfying the creative urge brings personal fulfillment. I do not believe that any of us who desire originating new ideas are ever truly happy unless purposely active. We express ourselves continually, often in ways no more remarkable than arranging a bouquet of flowers, decorating a birthday cake or adding a humorous line to a technical document. The creative mind without a release-valve suffers in misery.
- I believe that we are on the threshold of witnessing a seismic shift in the way we think about creativity. After all, once we acknowledge that expression is the natural yearning of every unique mind, we become empowered to explore our own potential and to better appreciate that of others.
- My friends, if you desire to create, don't wait around for somebody to give you permission. Take the initiative. There are no certainties in life, no guarantees for tomorrow. If there is something you wish to accomplish, make it happen yourself. If it is your dream, then you must be the catalyst for its realization. Go for it! Let no one discourage your passion.

- If people in your life are only interested in grumbling about how lousy everything is, how nobody has a chance, simply tune them out and then get busy making your dreams come true.

### **Writing**

- Being a writer is as much a natural part of my makeup as being female.
- A good writer will make you care without once telling you that you should care.

### **Persistence**

- No matter where you are at, you must not give up or you will deprive yourself of all the unforeseeable possibilities that may be awaiting you at the very next intersection. Instead of despairing in the self-pity, try opening your eyes a little wider, straining your ears to hear a little further. You may just see the bright flicker of a smile or hear the sweet voice of a new friend.
- Do not wait for a miracle, for Prince Charming or for that lottery jackpot. Do not wait for validation from others. Simply believe in yourself and in your dreams and take a step forward.
- Some people look at a pile of cow manure and hold their noses in disgust. Wiser people realize that given a little time and a few turns in the compost heap, that manure will mellow into good, rich fertilizer, precisely what one needs to grow a beautiful crop of roses.

### **Digital Publishing**

- When we digitally publish a book, we find ourselves marketing a product that is produced on demand. In other words, supply becomes demand. The books are printed one at a time, and that is how we must sell them, one reader at a time, one click at a time. But this really goes beyond books. I think this would apply to any product or service that is created digitally and marketed on demand.

### **Book Marketing**

- *Will anyone want to purchase the book?*  
*Is the author/publisher capable of making potential readers aware of the book's existence?*  
I don't care how or by whom the book is published, these are the only two issues that are relevant.
- There is no such thing as a single strategy that is perfect for marketing every book. After all, we are selling books, not cans of corn.
- Even if there were such a thing as a sure-fire scheme, it would immediately become so overused that it would quickly become useless.

## **Self-Promotion**

- This world is so full of our ilk—dreamers, fighting to scratch out our own little niche in the grand menagerie of popular culture.

## **Web Site Design**

- Think of it this way: if you were to invite guests to your home for a party, you wouldn't place roadblocks in the street in front of the house and fill the driveway with obstacles. Similarly, when planning a website take care to consider your guests in every decision concerning content and layout.

## **On Being Legally Blind**

- Yes, people actually pay this legally blind gal to design web sites. As I like to say, I have to design web sites because I don't know enough about baseball to become an umpire.
- I love to play around with graphics' software. Somehow, I find it relaxing, like doodling. I can't draw a straight line. My handwriting is worse than lousy. There is no way I can paint a realistic horse, rabbit, sunset or vase of flowers. But give me a software package that allows me to enlarge as needed, undo mistakes, move and resize objects, use grids to get placement right, and I can play all day long.
- To parents, grandparents and teachers: Please do not assume that your youngster is doomed to failure because she cannot see the world in the same detail as you. Give her every opportunity to explore her world and her interests on her own terms and you may be shocked at how far she will soar.
- How privileged I am to live at this moment and in this place at a time when technology is ever expanding the realm of the possible and in a country where a girl can start with nothing and still summon the tools to design her own destiny. May it always be so. May we always encourage innovation, creativity and hope.
- I was born with visual limitations predetermined by my genes. While scientists will eventually find ways to override genetic disorders, that's not going to help me. Therefore, I've always understood that it's up to me to make the most of the tools at my disposal. Even so, how could I have dared to dream that the day would come when I could sit at my desk and converse with the world? I have a good imagination, but never did it occur to me that technological advancements would someday permit me to start my own publishing company without leaving my home. Already, we find it far too easy to take computer technologies for granted, for they have become so ubiquitous in our everyday lives. But I can't take them for granted because in a very real

way, computers have meant my liberation, have become my vehicle for self-expression. To all the inventors and innovators, thank you. What a fabulous time to be alive! How sweet the air that I breathe; how limitless the possibilities of tomorrow.

### **The Human Brain**

- While I think there is much to gain by making use of technology, we must not overlook any of our inherent tools. Fearlessly, make use of every tool at your disposal.

### **Tolerance**

- I realize that we live at a time when society constantly tells us to be very careful with our words unless we offend someone perceived as being different. But if we allow ourselves to become too guarded, too fearful of offence, we shut ourselves down from normal communication. Instead of a natural interaction, we only see the difference that we are repeatedly told to be mindful of. I find this to be a very bad thing for our society and certain to cause further alienation and distrust.

### **Accomplishment**

- After all, in our media saturated society it is pretty tough to get noticed unless you have accomplished something bigger or badder than ever before achieved. My problem with that, I fear it conditions us to think of accomplishment and achievement only in those narrow terms. If we allow that to happen, will we fail to notice the little accomplishments in the lives around us? Will we fail to acknowledge our own small accomplishments because they are only small accomplishments and, as society teaches us, only big accomplishments count?

### **Life**

- Make a habit of absorbing life's special little moments, revel in them, soak them up like a sponge. Become saturated with sweet memories. This will help to neutralize the sting from those inevitable disappointments that touch every life.
- Become a careful observer of your world. There are so many wonderful things worth noticing. Celebrate every blossom that your life-garden sprouts. Notice your own little accomplishments and you may suddenly feel motivated to scale unprecedented heights.

Dear Producer,

Would you hire a blind woman to design your web site?

“Yes, people actually pay this legally blind gal to design web sites. As I like to say, I have to design web sites because I don’t know enough about baseball to become an umpire.” –Sarah Mankowski

Sarah Mankowski represents the forth generation born with cataracts in her family. She also inherited a burning desire for self-expression that could not be extinguished despite many obstacles. Now, in ***Liberation: One Writer’s Adventures and Misadventures on the Digital Playground***, she reveals how computers and the Internet provided mobility, expanding opportunities for expression. In this collection of essays Mankowski shares her enthusiasm for digital publishing and web design, drawn from experiences as writer, mentor, and owner/ editor of WordThunder.com.

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Practical, down-to-earth and entertaining, Sarah Mankowski is available to speak on the following topics:

- Disabilities and the Internet, navigating the world without a driver’s license.
- Strategies elderly individuals losing eyesight can use both online and off.
- Locating online assistance for parents, grandparents and teachers working with children with disabilities.
- What does it mean to be legally blind? Hey, ask me anything!
- How to find your creative niche online.
- Digital publishing is democratic publishing

A media kit is avowable upon request or can be downloaded from  
<http://wordthunder.com/books/>

All the best,

Sarah Mankowski

321-452-2008 for WordThunder Publications/Sarah Mankowski

**911 Interviews Available! Call anytime.**

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## *Ten Questions for Sarah Mankowski*

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1. "I have a problem with judging the potential of any technology based upon the behavior of the laziest and most disreputable among us." **From your viewpoint, what are the potential positives and negatives of the Internet?**
2. "I believe that we are on the threshold of witnessing a seismic shift in the way we think about creativity. After all, once we acknowledge that expression is the natural yearning of every unique mind, we become empowered to explore our own potential and to better appreciate that of others." **How has the Internet/technology changed the way we think about creativity?**
3. "There are no certainties in life, no guarantees for tomorrow. If there is something you wish to accomplish, make it happen yourself. If it is your dream, then you must be the catalyst for its realization. Go for it! Let no one discourage your passion." **A recurring theme in *Liberation* is the importance of taking the initiative in making your dream come true. You are passionate on this point. Where does that passion come from?**
4. "If people in your life are only interested in grumbling about how lousy everything is, how nobody has a chance, simply tune them out and then get busy making your dreams come true." **How do we maintain the momentum when we have people in our lives who are discouraging the effort or downright abusive in their criticism?**

5. “No matter where you are at, you must not give up or you will deprive yourself of all the unforeseeable possibilities that may be awaiting you at the very next intersection. Instead of despairing in the self-pity, try opening your eyes a little wider, straining your ears to hear a little further. You may just see the bright flicker of a smile or hear the sweet voice of a new friend.” **Although you are an optimist, you write about a time in your life when you reached a point of such despair that you attempted suicide. Why did you think it important to write about that incident?**
6. “I love to play around with graphics’ software. Somehow, I find it relaxing, like doodling. I can’t draw a straight line. My handwriting is worse than lousy. There is no way I can paint a realistic horse, rabbit, sunset or vase of flowers. But give me a software package that allows me to enlarge as needed, undo mistakes, move and resize objects, use grids to get placement right, and I can play all day long.” **Many listeners may find it strange that a legally blind person uses graphics software like Fireworks and Photoshop and web design software like Dreamweaver. What does such software offer for people with limited eyesight?**
7. “To parents, grandparents and teachers: Please do not assume that your youngster is doomed to failure because she cannot see the world in the same detail as you. Give her every opportunity to explore her world and her interests on her own terms and you may be shocked at how far she will soar.” **What additional advice do you have for parents, grandparents and teachers working with children with visual limitations?**
8. “I realize that we live at a time when society constantly tells us to be very careful with our words unless we offend someone perceived as being different. But if we allow ourselves to become too guarded, too fearful of offence, we shut ourselves down from normal communication. Instead of a natural interaction, we only see the difference that we are repeatedly told to be mindful of. I find this to be a very bad thing for our society and certain to cause further alienation and distrust.” **Some people may feel a little awkward when interacting with people with disabilities. What suggestions can you offer?**
9. “Being a writer is as much a natural part of my makeup as being female.” **When did you realize that you wanted to be a writer?**
10. “There is no such thing as a single strategy that is perfect for marketing every book. After all, we are selling books, not cans of corn. ... Even if there were such a thing as a sure-fire scheme, it would immediately become so overused that it would quickly become useless.” **In *Liberation* you write about marketing books online. But your suggestions could apply to marketing anything online. Could you elaborate on these techniques?**



## EXCERPT

# Old Photos

The red cast on the faded thirty-year-old photo wasn't its only problem. The scanner dutifully reproduced every yellowed splotch and stain.

I had purchased the cheap camera with baby-sitting earnings when I was about fifteen. Some people probably thought it odd that a legally blind girl would want to take pictures. I suppose I never cared that much about what people thought. By holding the camera close to my right eye, my better eye, I could center on my subject and take reasonably good shots. While most of the photos have that reddish tint and fading, they remain a more accurate record than the muddled pictures in my head; my long-tem reminiscence being filled with murky images and half-forgotten names.

I gaze at the image in the Photoshop window. My parents are standing in the yard next to the apartment. They are both about fifty, although they look much older. My father is thin and gaunt, my mother prematurely gray. He wears suspenders, she the same well-worn dress that she has on in most of my photos. At a glance it is obvious that the two are well acquainted with hardship.

They stand beside my father's prized collection of crotons, his obsession at that time. The red, orange, green, cream and yellow of the once brightly patterned leaves have faded in the photo. I want to get the

colors back. I want to get it all back, the green of the grass, the blue sky and all the tinier details lost in shadow.

I call up Curves and touch the Highlights eyedropper to the lightest part of the photo. Immediately, the picture brightens. Details immerge from the shadows, a bit of grass and sidewalk. I want more.

My introduction to computer graphics began with Microsoft's Paint, a really basic program packaged with Windows. The ability to zoom in as necessary allowed me to make corrections with a fair degree of accuracy. Although basic, Paint illustrated the potential of graphics software and I was hooked. Eventually I purchased Macromedia's Fireworks bundled with Dreamweaver. Fireworks remains my favorite, particularly for web design. Every aspect of the image is easily manipulated, a huge advantage for those of us who make frequent corrections. Adobe's Photoshop, of course, is the better choice for restoring old photographs.

I zoom in over one of the yellowed splotches. By sampling and selecting pixels from the surrounding area, I can easily remove the yellow.

Zoom out to see what I've accomplished.

Better. Not perfect. Old photos can be cleaned up, but there are limitations. If the quality was poor to begin with, there is just so much that can be accomplished.

I gaze at the photo. Perhaps if I play around with Levels I can pull out a bit more detail from the shadows. Possibly there will be something more to see, maybe something important I've forgotten. Perhaps . . . A hot tear rolls down my face. What am I looking for?

*Geez, Sarah, cut it out. What do you think you'll find behind the shadows?* The green grass and the crotons have long-since perished. My father is gone. Only the withered pictures remain. Photoshop can't restore the sounds of Daddy's radio drifting through the living room window, or my sisters' laughter from the porch, or the good aroma of Mama's corn muffins wafting out from the kitchen stove.

Try Levels. Play with the shadow settings. Maybe I can make the colors brighter.

If only I could expand the photo to reveal the whole yard and the apartments beyond. If only I could expand even further to reveal the entirety of the Westlake Apartments where we lived, then further still to capture the totality of my childhood. Perhaps, then, I could more easily relate my peculiar journey.

In addition to Sarah Mankowski's journey, *Liberation* includes essays related to the various aspects of the story:

### **Appendix A: The Internet Past and Future**

- On Technology
- What Was So Great About It, Anyway
- Better Times To Come
- Lessons from Amazon
- How to Make a Million Online

### **Appendix B: Digital Publishing**

- Digital Publishing
- Print On Demand
- Brick-and-Mortar vs. Click-and-Mortar -
- The Hidden Costs of POD Publishing -
- Talent is Not Enough
- Book Promotion Online
- Selling Books One Click at a Time -
- Marketing Books Online
- Sarah's Writing Pet Peeves

### **Appendix C: On Being Legally Blind**

- On Being Legally Blind
- Observing With All Five Senses
- Strategic Thinking

### **Appendix D: Life**

- An Optimist Wavers
- Just One Big Neighborhood
- Accomplishment and Success

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*“Many books have been written about the brilliant entrepreneurs and  
computer geniuses who devised and defined the digital revolution of the ‘90s.  
To be sure, my story is a far more modest account, but one that nevertheless  
demonstrates the limitless possibilities of our time. To understand a  
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***Liberation: One Writer’s Adventures and  
Misadventures on the Digital Playground***  
**by Sarah Mankowski - \$9.95, ISBN: 0974526800 -  
Internet Publishing/Biography**

## Examples of Websites Designed by Sarah Mankowski

- U R My Hero – <http://urmyhero.com>
- PODinfo.com – <http://podinfo.com>
- Best Book Links – <http://bestbooklinks.com>
- Readers Writers Rewards – <http://suzettehopkins.com/rewards>
- Sure-Flow – <http://sure-flow.com>
- The Millionaire Maverick – <http://www.millionairemaverick.com/>
- Don Mankowski's site – <http://djman.wordthunder.com/>
- Fred Holly's Rubik Cube Designs – <http://holly.wordthunder.com/>
- The Joy Maven's Haven – <http://www.wordthunder.com/suz/>
- Sarah Mankowski's Site – <http://sarahmankowski.com>
- BookBanter Book Club – <http://bookbanter.com>
- WordThunder Publications – <http://wordthunder.com/books/>

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