1: Steve

I'm not sure why I started writing.

In high school I never liked writing, doing anything I could to get out of any projects that we had. I struggled to get through essay assignments, even those that interested me. It seemed that putting my thoughts down on paper in any kind of organized fashion was only slightly interesting than cutting the half acre of grass in our yard with a push mower. And that was my least favorite chore, especially in the 90 degree, 90% humidity summers of Virginia Beach.

The first day of my senior year English class in high school had me presented with a syllabus that noted we would write a 3-5 page essay every week of the year in class. I was severely tempted to switch to another class that day, but my desire to impress a college admissions board won out and I made it through the year with a solid B. However an interesting thing happened over that year.

After dreading the Friday essay for months, at some point I started to look forward to the challenge. I didn’t love the writing, but I think I figured out the pattern of writing an essay and it became easier. I also saw this as an investment in the Advanced Placement (AP) test I had scheduled for April, and a possible way to stop writing. A good score on my AP exam might exempt me from Freshman English in college, and that was pretty good motivation to meet the challenge head on. I ended up scoring well enough on the exam that I was exempted from the first year torture most college students suffer through in Freshman English.

In college I started as a computer science major at Syracuse University. My focus was on math and computers for the most part. With 18 credits to my name from high school, I had the chance to take numerous electives, none of which involved writing. I think my first year I ended up stuck with just one class that required writing: philosophy.

I wrote a few stories, but I never spent that much time on them and it nagged me over time. In 1999 I moved to Denver for a new job at a startup and came alone while my wife stayed in Virginia trying to sell our house. For some reason, I got solicited as an author and decided to take one of the tricks I'd learned with SQL Server 6.5 and write a short article. I sent it to the SQL Server Journal in the UK and forgot about it.

A few months later, the family safely out in Denver, I received a check for $150. At the time I was making $75k, so it wasn't a huge amount, but it was one of the coolest paychecks I'd ever received. In the same package were 2 copies of the journal and it was quite a thrill to see my name in print. I continued to write a few more articles over the next year, about 6 or 7, and received more checks, making a small, but very enjoyable new income.

In 2000, the dot com boom was flying and work was busy. I found myself using Swynk.com to solve problems and get ideas. One of the first ones I got was a SourceSafe archive utility by Bill Wunder. While using the site, I realized that most of the tricks and techniques weren't that complex and I'd even thought of a few. It was then I noticed a "write for us" link and clicked on it. At the time, the payment schedule allowed for you to submit as many articles as you wanted and receiving tiered payments that were based on hits. Writing one a week could bring you up to $285 a month if you got a good amount of hits. I had my eye on an old 911 or 912, so this was my in. I sent in an article and got accepted and I was off.

I didn't get the 911, but the rest is history.