

**Getting Published**  
**or**  
**Back to Basics**  
by  
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A morose older author told me this story and vowed that it is true.

Cecil's Hoboken office was unimpressive but he refused to pay the sky-high rents of Manhattan and knew other, equally prosperous literary agents who worked from their posh college club.

Cecil belonged to no club, having dropped out of college after three semesters, worn down by alcoholic parents and poverty. Nobody valued him then except the army whose tests unearthed a formidable intelligence and verbal skill. Thus, following his basic training, he was made a public relations clerk in Washington instead of becoming the typical bullet stopper in Vietnam.

Two years later, after breaking his father's nose and again being thrown out of the house, Cecil married a woman with an apartment and discovered his sales ability. First with newly issued stocks and later with manuscripts. There was little difference in their marketing, he reflected, from his moderately high perch in his (hopefully) final career.

Cecil knew that most agents discriminated against unpublished and older writers but considered this shortsighted. None could be sure what would sell, whether written by an unmarried English mother on welfare or, allegedly, a cuddly dog. So Cecil welcomed all authors in his search for books which would be cherished by the public. Products which he, baptized "Alphonso" and college dropout, could sense.

He was once told of a German word which perfectly described his talent: *fingerspitzengefühl*. The ability to perceive something intangible, as if with one's finger tips. Money was what Cecil smelled, and this elderly man's pages reeked of it.

"Did other agents reject this?" Cecil née Alphonso asked.

"Yes sir, many," the man replied humbly. Cecil warmed to his tone, having suffered for decades the demeaning attitude of publishing executives. Those who lowered themselves to take his calls.

"Would you like coffee or soda?" Cecil was still shocked by how many new agents ignored such courtesies.

"A little water if you have it, sir."

"Of course."

While Cecil walked to the refrigerator, he studied his visitor. There was something impressive about this man as if, unlike so many writers, he *knew* who he was.

What Cecil was about to say was harsh but necessary: this writer must learn the truth and accept Cecil's sage advice. Writers were stubborn, self-centered creatures, filled with delusions of importance. Where would even the most talented be if it weren't for their agent?

"I read all that you sent..." Cecil began, and the old man nodded gratefully, "and I liked it." An expectant smile lit the man's face. One which, oddly, caused Cecil to become calm and feel innocent, like a child. Better do something about this, he thought. "*Some* of it," he added quickly.

The smile left the man's face.

"I'll be frank. The reason other agents wouldn't touch what you wrote isn't because it's not good but because you're...*old*." Cecil qualified his statement to lessen its sting. "Not *that* old. Just not young enough so publishers would push it. I suggest you use a pseudonym—Tiffany Hott! Nineteen year old Yale sex columnist, martial arts expert, and authentic blond. We'll hire an actress for public appearances. With this *tiny* change your story of families and wars could be big. Maybe an HBO mini-series."

"I'll consider what you say," the writer replied softly, standing and collecting his handwritten pages. He is *really* old, Cecil thought. But the lines lend dignity to his face, which is still handsome.

With enough makeup and coaching he could be introduced as Tiffany's great grandfather. Now, back to basics.

"Your work is terrific," Cecil repeated, "but the title lacks appeal and must be changed. No publisher will buy a book called 'Bible.'"