

Taylor Kmiec

Q and A with Necee Regis

Freelance journalism is one of the hardest fields to be successful in, however, Necee Regis has made a successful career in it for over 20 years.

Regis has been a freelance journalist since around 2005 and has written for numerous magazines and newspapers, and even has a reoccurring column in the Boston Globe and has been featured in the Los Angeles Post and Washington Post. Regis sat down with me for an interview to explore her life as a journalist and gather insight into her views of journalism, more specifically freelance journalism.

Who are you? Tell us about yourself.

I am a freelance journalist who writes about food and travel, and food as it relates to travel. I write more about cultural tourism than, say, adventure tourism. I go to cities, or I'll go places and write about what I find there. My background is not in journalism.

My background is I have a Master of Fine Arts from Mars College of Art as a visual artist. And at a certain point, I got after like 20 years of exhibiting and living in the artist world, I got interested in writing. And I, through circumstances, got hooked on a website called Digital Sitcom. And I got this gig doing writing for various cities. And I didn't have to go to those places. I just had to call them up. And those were my early steps at trying my hand at this field. One thing led to another, and I have now had a 20-year career as a practicing journalist.

Although I did one time have a friend who said to me, the synonym for freelance is unemployed. So, there are pros and cons to this life.

So, you didn't always know you wanted to be a journalist?

No, but apparently, I could write. Through another friend, I got a phone call from someone who said, "I hear you're doing some writing online. And you know, I have a friend at the Boston Globe who's putting together an advertorial section and, you know, could use a writer." So, I did that. And she wrote to me and said, "You have the voice." Then she hooked me

up to the travel section at the Globe. And I pretty much have been writing for them ever since, as well as other newspapers and magazines over the years. So no, I had no idea.

What made you decide to be a freelance journalist rather than just strictly working with one company?

I don't know if I had been offered a job, would I have taken it? I might have. But I also liked I've always worked for myself freelance, it's all I knew. I was always putting together an income. But freelance allowed me great flexibility in terms of travel.

I would spend my winters in Florida because I hated winters and taking a full time job meant I'd give that up. You know, you get something, a steady paycheck. But then you lose your freedom to be wherever, whenever you want. So, I don't know if I would have taken that job. I like the freelance life.

Do you think that there was any part of your childhood that kind of shaped what you do now professionally?

Well, I don't know for sure, but I was always a kid drawing, and I was always writing. I have a novel that I wrote when I was in sixth grade. I have books that I from younger than that that I wrote and illustrated. My dad had been a pilot. He died when I was very young. But I always knew that he could fly. And I've written essays and created art pieces about flying and airplanes. And so, I always wondered, like, what was there that some unconscious connection.

What's it like as a freelance journalist?

That you must be an organized person. I also think you must be okay with some insecurity. You must find ways to support yourself. I was lucky enough to have an apartment in Boston and an apartment in Miami, wherever I wasn't, I was subletting. I describe myself as a freelance writer and landlord.

You must also be good at time management. It's important to set times aside, certain times for pitching and certain times for writing. And you'll have certain times of insecurity, and

then certain times where you have a lot of work. So sometimes I have so much work, but you can't ever say no. You know, say "Yeah, I got \$3,000. I'm going to go on a spending spree." You must know how to budget. You must learn how to pitch a story.

And as I said, I kind of stumbled into it luckily. So, I was able to get credentials almost right away for the Boston Globe and then use that to get other jobs. It's all sort of who, you know.

What is some advice you would give to somebody who is just beginning to become a freelance journalist?

I guess it just depends on the person and the personality. If it works for you, that's fine but don't feel like you're being taken advantage of because freelancers don't have to be on salary or have benefits. I guess it depends on what you feel comfortable with.

Also, write about what you know and are passionate about and stay organized. You might need another job while you're getting started and that's okay. But then you must just be persistent in making connections in any way that you can. That would be my advice and ask yourself why you're doing it.

How did the COVID pandemic kind of impact your life?

It did very much. I think the whole industry, obviously of travel changed. Luckily, I've been for the past ten years doing a travel column for The Boston Globe. That is a weekly column that I share with a colleague that comes out every other week. So, I do write every other week. The column is called "Here, There, and Everywhere" It's about travel news. I get a million pitches through email, and I didn't have to go to any of these places, so I would pick and choose what I thought the readers would like. And my other criteria for choosing was if it amused me. What I wrote about change, but luckily, they didn't cancel that column. And the weeks that I didn't get a paycheck, I got supplemental Covid relief income. So, I did well.

How has the field of journalism changed since you've been working?

The travel writing industry significantly changed, I think for the worse. I think social media has changed the face of journalism. Because everyone can be a journalist, or everyone can put their opinion out online, then you think, are people fact-checking things? Where are they getting their sources from? Everyone was writing, but what could you trust?

But I think social media has shortened everyone's attention span, including mine. No one wants to read an 800-word story. Most people are reading everything online, and I don't think the airlines even have magazines anymore on the airline.

Travel has been, in my mind reduced to a series of. All people want is lists, even The Washington Post. I think I just had my last story. They've changed the travel section to something called, "By the Way". And it's all a little short service-oriented story, there's no real writing anymore, which is sad, but people also don't have the patience to read. In new stories, hopefully, it's different.