

>>Snapshot



Jan Carberry

Journalist

NUJ

Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?

I took the traditional route into journalism taking a pre-entry qualification at college and then three years ‘indentures’ to gain my NCTJ proficiency. After various posts in local newspapers, I moved to the South London Press as News Editor where I spent ten years working my way up to Acting Editor. After this, I became Assistant Editor at Which? Magazine.

At this point my career took a detour. When my daughter was born, I left my staff job on Which? Magazine and continued doing freelance work for them with the intention of returning to journalism when my daughter started school. Out of the blue, my husband became seriously ill and was hospitalised for six months. As he was self-employed and we could not claim benefits, I needed an income quickly. Suddenly I was the sole earner and carer for our three year old. I took the pragmatic decision to take a job at my daughter’s school where I had already been volunteering. After three months convalescence at home, my husband thankfully recovered. However, within nine months of his return to work I was diagnosed with breast cancer. By reducing my hours I was able to continue at the school while I went through treatment as it allowed me a work-life balance necessary for our fragile health circumstances.

I came to an FEU Training workshop knowing that I wanted to get back to doing what I loved but with my confidence a bit bruised. The workshop and fellow attendees helped me to change how I was looking at what I had been through, and to feel more confident about my next steps.

I’d been thinking about going freelance at this point and learning more about bid management. Then, an opportunity came up to do a bid management role at a homelessness charity, which I took. This got me back into using many of my writing and planning skills and has helped me rebuild my confidence. So much so, I recently took voluntary redundancy because temporary

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unemployment holds no fear for me now. I know that with the support of the NUJ and FEU Training I will be able to once again reinvent my career.

What do you like most about your work?

For me journalism has always been about helping people that need a voice. It’s why I continued to work in local papers for so long. It is a form of social democracy – helping people to find a voice, uncovering things people need to know and fighting consumer battles. This was why I went to Which? It gives me a sense of doing something worthwhile.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

I’m actually quite new to freelancing, but the challenges for me have been getting myself set up to launch my freelance business properly – things such as my online presence and social media strategies as well as rebuilding contacts. I’m project managing myself to approach my freelance business professionally.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

I learned about bid writing as I saw it as an emerging area and therefore a potential opportunity for someone with my



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skills. I have also had to expand my skills to cover online journalism and digital tools as well as developing social media skills.

What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

The biggest challenge is finding the time to practise what you have learnt in order to become proficient. It is easy to do a course and not follow through to really embed the new skills.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

Get Hired, Write that book and get it published, Social media at work, Finance for freelancers, Using data to make money and Speak up for yourself.

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How has what you've learnt helped you?

FEU Training helped me get back into journalism. The first workshop I attended was Get Hired, which was a real turning point for me. It helped me to see all my experiences from new perspectives and gave me a huge confidence boost to get back out there. As well as the workshop content, the conversations I had with other attendees really helped to change my attitudes and interpretations of my career to date.

I've got so much from all the workshops I have attended, from new ideas to confirmation that I am on the right track. I always find the sessions energising. They have helped me regain my confidence and close down moments of self-doubt.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU training sessions?

You can always learn so much more when you are with a group that wants to be there and who are so generous in what they share. I relish working with participants from the other unions, particularly the actors, as many of them seem to have such a different mindset to journalists. They seem to project confidence, I find them so inspiring.

FEU Training is a great network. I find it so supportive being with like-minded colleagues. It's like a security blanket that you can dip into, so if you are feeling a bit isolated then get yourself on a course and give yourself a boost.