“So, I did.”

Javacia Harris Bowser & See Jane Write

By: Sophia Surrett

A “regular girl who works really hard,” Javacia Harris Bowser, journalist, essayist and blogger, searched for a community of women writers to share wisdom, receive encouragement and push each other toward being better writers.

“I kept looking for a women’s writing group that would welcome what I call multi-passionate writers, so writers that do a little bit of everything,” Bowser said. “And, I couldn’t find that.”

Bowser spent two years asking around to see what communities might be out there. But, with slight hesitation, Bowser took some of her fellow women writers' advice to create the community she desired.

“I resisted the suggestion to start one for two years. And then in 2011, I decided okay whatever I’ll just go ahead and start it,” Bowser said. “So, I did.”

What originally “wasn’t meant to be a journalism start-up at first,” See Jane Write was born.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, Bowser graduated from the University of Alabama with her Bachelor’s degrees in Journalism, English and creative writing. A few years later in 2005, Bowser received her Master’s degree in Journalism from the University of California - Berkeley.

After graduating with two degrees, Bowser accepted a job in Louisville, Kentucky as a newspaper reporter at The Courier-Journal*.* Bowser is from Birmingham, Alabama, and in 2009, she returned to her home state to teach English at the Alabama of Fine Arts. Knowing she still wanted to write, in 2011, she created See Jane Write to do just that.

“I knew that I wanted to continue to write even while I was teaching,” Bowser said. “And I also knew it was going to be easier to do that if I had a community of women writers supporting me.”

Alongside See Jane Write, Bowser is freelancing writing for HerMoney, Babypalooza, StyleBlueprint and Good Grit Magazine.

“My accountant now treats my freelancing and SJW as two separate businesses,” Bowser said.

Bowser’s accountant won’t let Bowser combine the two, even though Bowser joked she keeps asking.

THE BEGINNING

Over tacos, Bowser and about a dozen other women met to talk about writing. One of the topics discussed was Twitter as a beneficial platform for journalists. One of the women writers suggested that Bowser host a writing workshop and promote it on Twitter for the next event.

“I hadn’t thought about the next event, and I thought the next event would just be this again sitting there talking,” Bowser said. “So, I did that.”

The Twitter workshop welcomed around 40 people to talk and learn about writing from Bowser. By the end, Bowser said people were asking her about future events and workshops, and suggesting topic ideas they would like to learn about.

“It was supposed to just be a group of women getting together once a month to talk about their writing projects and encourage each other,” Bowser said. “It turned out not being that, it turned out being much bigger.”

See Jane Write began to grow into a community of women writers that Bowser dreamed of.

WHO IS JANE?

One question Bowser gets often is “Who is Jane?” Since Bowser didn’t use her first name “See Javacia Write” instead of “See Jane Write,” some were wondering about the connection.

“See Jane Write is a play on the Dick and Jane books,” Bowser said. “The sentences were really simple like ‘See Jane run, See Jane skip,’ and the play on that, so ‘See Jane write.’ But, it’s like Jane grew up and she’s a writer now.”

Bowser said these books were lying around her house from her parent’s generation, but she, and her generation, still learned how to read with them.

When people started asking more often what the name meant, Bowser considered a name change.

“I thought about changing the name because people will ask where it came from,” Bowser said. “At this point, it’s kind of stuck. The women of the community call each other the ‘Janes.’”

DOWN TO BUSINESS

For a couple of years, after See Jane Write was founded, Bowser was still hosting workshops and events, but she wasn’t charging for events, and See Jane Write wasn’t officially a business at the time.

Originally, Bowser wasn’t trying to make a profit from See Jane Write, but she “was just trying to break even, so [she] could lower [her] husband’s blood pressure.”

“I was paying for everything out-of-pocket. It turned into a very expensive hobby,” Bowser said. “So, in 2013, I filled out all the paperwork to make See Jane Write a business.”

According to Bowser, the hardest part about owning a business is the bookkeeping, taxes and paperwork, or as she calls it, “the unsexy stuff.”

“When you’re in a creative business, you just want to be creative. You don’t want to do all of that mess. But, you have to,” Bowser said. “So, honestly, that has been very challenging for me.”

Initially, Bowser tried to independently fill out the legal paperwork through LegalZoom and file state and federal paperwork for her business. But, Bowser said she didn’t know what she was doing.

“I did everything wrong, and the only reason I knew I was wrong was that at the time my friend was a lawyer, and he, out of the kindness of his heart, decided to help me out,” Bowser said. “I showed him this LegalZoom stuff I had done, and he was like ‘What is this?’”

After getting legal advice from her friend, the federal paperwork was fixed. For the local and state paperwork, Bowser had her accountant help her sort through and fix the paperwork.

“Even to this day, taxes and business licenses, and all that stuff, give me so much anxiety,” Bowser said. “I hate it. I hate it so much.”

FUNDING

“I’ve completely self-funded everything,” Bowser said.

Events, full-time freelancing, coaching sessions and membership dues now help Bowser run her business comfortably as she started to get an upper hand in her finances.

“Once See Jane Write became a business, I created the membership program,” Bowser said. “This has evolved a lot over time.”

Bowser’s paid membership for women (trans women and non-binary as well) writers offers a more exclusive experience of See Jane Write. Membership gives access to

* weekly writing and flash-in sessions
* check-ins on setting writing goals
* an hour-long a writing-session monthly
* monthly critique sessions
* monthly goal-setting sessions
* special virtual events on different topics for members only

Membership is $27 per month or $297 annually plus a free coaching session with Bowser.

When Bowser began charging for See Jane Write memberships, she only charged $25 annually saying she “didn’t know what [she] was doing.” See Jane Write was a free resource “for a very long time,” according to Bowser.

“While there were some people that were like ‘What? You’re charging me?’, people were trying to give me money before it was even a business,” Bowser said.

After looking at competitors’ and similar business venture prices, Bowser over time raised the price to $9.99 per month, $19.99 per month, and now to $27 per month.

 In the beginning, Bowser said she didn’t need any overhead as See Jane Write is a digital platform. But, Bowser is trying to expand See Jane Write and needs money to do so.

See Jane Write is a digital platform, so Bowser said she didn’t need any overhead in the beginning. Now she is trying to expand See Jane Write and needs money to do so.

 “I am at the point now where I’m trying to really grow, and I need money,” Bowser said. “So, I lately have been applying for a lot of different grants. I’ve gotten some of them so that is helping a little bit.”

CONSISTENCY

Bowser makes sure to stay in people’s inboxes through her email newsletters, website, text community and Facebook group.

“I make sure I always show up somewhere,” Bowser said. “ It’s all about staying top of mind.”

One of Bowser’s focus points for her business is to write stories, blog posts, etc. to spark conversation and keep it going.

“I always try to keep in mind that it’s not really about the story, like that in and of itself is never going to be enough,” Bowser said.

Whenever Browser posts about a certain topic in her blog post, she will follow up with email newsletters about said topic and sends out questions to her Facebook community group to start a conversation about the topic.

“It’s really about pacing whatever story you have, but creating a conversation,” Bowser said.

EXPANSION

When Bowser made See Jane Write a business in 2013, she also started a website called See Jane Write Magazine. Her goal was to have other writers’ articles alongside her own, but, at the time, she couldn’t pay them for their content.

“I had all of these different folks writing for me, and the content was great. But, it wasn’t sustainable because I didn’t have any money, so I couldn’t pay them,” Bowser said. “Even though they were willing to write for free, eventually I started feeling very guilty about that.”

Even though Bowser wanted to have a separate platform for writing articles alongside others, she said she began to regret her decision on creating two websites as “having two websites that basically have the same name was super confusing.”

Bowser said she had to let the See Jane Write Magazine go while she focused on her original website, building up her memberships, starting coaching and more since she couldn’t afford the magazine until this year.

“Now that my coaching and the membership are doing well, I do have money where I can actually pay writers. So, this year, I’m actually going to start doing that,” Bowser said. “It will be like the old website and have other folks writing for it, not just me, only it will be better because I will actually be paying for them.”

Within the next year, Bowser is hoping to start releasing anthologies of the sets of work from See Jane Write in addition to newer pieces as well.

Bowser has published a book called “Find Your Way Back” which is a collection of essays on how she has succeeded in her business, persevered through hardship and came out on the other side brighter.

Through the book, Bowser has seen her business “grow into so much more than what [she] anticipated it being.”

“It’s an actual business now,” Bowser said.

COMMUNITY

“My favorite part is absolutely the community. Our sessions are magical,” Bowser said. “We cry, we laugh, we celebrate each other’s wins, it’s just amazing.”

Bowser said she is very big on community, which is why she focuses so heavily on it in her business.

With See Jane Write, Bowser said her favorite part is when “women of the community are just constantly saying that See Jane Write has changed their life.”

Bowser said See Jane Write has changed her life too.

“See Jane Write made me an entrepreneur, but then on a personal level, most of the women of SJW are my friends, clients,” Bowser said.

When Bowser was going through cancer treatment, the pandemic hindered her in-person connection to others, but she said her friends still supported her so much.

“Not only was I getting text messages, social media messages and emails encouraging me, but they also kept sending me gifts,” Bowser said. “I’m not exaggerating when I say this, every single day of my cancer treatment, there was at least one package on my porch. Every. Single. Day.”

Sometimes, more than one package would show up, Bowser said. The packages included t-shirts, mugs, books, flowers, edible arrangements, food and plants to name a few.

“It’s just amazing,” Bowser said.

AN INESCAPABLE PAUSE

Before Bowser quit teaching in 2019, Bowser was a full-time teacher, part-time freelancing and doing See Jane Write for almost a decade. As for her work/life balance, she “used to not [have one] at all.”

“I was balancing all three of those for a very long time,” Bowser said. “So how did I balance all these things?”

One key aspect of balancing three jobs was to plan everything according to Bowser. Bowser describes herself as “an obsessive planner,’ making sure to even write “shower” on her planner.

“I plan everything, but I also - and I know this sounds cliché - I prioritized self-care,” Bowser said.

Self-care looks different to everyone, Bowser said. For her, it looked like making time to journal and exercise every day, spending time with loved ones at least once a week and, especially, making time to watch her TV.

“I love watching TV. People assume that really busy people don’t watch TV. That is probably the case for most people, but not for me,” Bowser said. “Because I schedule my TV time, you will see in my planner, ‘Watch Criminal Minds.’”

Self-care is sometimes left behind in a fast pace work environment, but for Bowser, self-care was not optional.

“I’m a breast cancer survivor. That changed everything for me,” Bowser said. “Once cancer makes you sit down, you start prioritizing your wellness.”

On Jan. 4th, 2020, Bowser was diagnosed with breast cancer and spent the following year in active cancer treatment.

“2020 was a trash year for everybody, but, absolutely horrible for me,” Bowser said.

Initially, Bowser was told she wouldn’t need chemotherapy, but five months after her diagnosis, she had to begin chemotherapy.

“I did five months of chemo, and chemo drains you like you would not believe,” Bowser said.

2020 was also her first full year of being totally self-employed as a freelancer. And when COVID-19 hit, so did the companies’ freelancing budget she was writing for.

“I thought I was going to be broke. On paper, I should’ve been.,” Bowser said.

With the jobs that she had lost during the pandemic due to budget cuts, Bowser couldn’t replace that income by working harder due to her not having the energy to do so. Bowser said she had to “work smarter, not harder.”

“I had to find stuff that was going to pay more, but not be as difficult. I was fortunate enough that I found those things,” Bowser said. “2020 ended up being a very good year for me financially. I made more money in 2020 than I had ever before.”

In 2018, Bowser had three jobs, and in 2020, without the full-time teaching position, she had earned more money.

“I found jobs that were going to pay more but didn’t take up as much time,” Bowser said. “I did that because I had to because I didn’t have the energy to work as hard as I normally do.”

Bowser said she found out her income increased when she was doing the one thing she hates most - taxes.

“It was crazy. I was like ‘Wait. What?’ I made this much money? How did that happen?’” Bowser said. “2020 should’ve been a terrible year for me financially considering everything that was going on, instead it turned out to be my most lucrative year.”

Bowser said she doesn’t use the term “remission” as she was “cancer-free” when they removed the cancer from her body, but the cancer prevention treatment was what she had to go through.

“We don’t use [remission] in cancer land,” Bowser said. “It could come back tomorrow.”

On Dec. 2, 2020, almost a whole year after she started chemotherapy, she finished her last day of active treatment. In 2023, Bowser is continuing to pass her examinations cancer-free.

To know more about becoming a See Jane Write member, click [here](https://seejanewritebham.com/membership/).

If you would like to join Javacia’s Facebook Group of Women Writers, click [here](https://www.facebook.com/groups/seejanewritebham/).

To see Javacia’s portfolio site, click [here](https://javacia.com/).

To watch Javacia’s TedTalk, click [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKgRcqjzlws).

To purchase Javacia’s book “Find Your Way Back,” click [here](https://seejanewritebham.com/find-your-way-back/).