

How I Met Madeleine L'Engle by T. A. Barron

If you walk in the direction of your dreams, you open yourself to serendipity ... and good things will happen. Maybe the best example I can give you of this is how I met Madeleine L'Engle.

It happened not long after I received the last of 32 rejection letters on my first attempt at a novel. I was, as you can imagine, a bit depressed—and very doubtful about the likelihood of *ever* becoming a writer. By chance, I happened to talk with a friend in Colorado, who had seen an unpublished story by one of my favorite authors, Madeleine L'Engle. "I'll send it to you," she offered. "Maybe it will cheer you up." "Sure," I answered, not at all convinced.

A week later, in the mail, I received the story. Written on the stationery of Madeleine's publisher, FSG, it was indeed delightful. It made me smile (for at least 2 or 3 seconds). As I sorted through the rest of that day's mail, however, I found an envelope addressed to me—from someone at FSG.

Just to give you a sense of my mood ... I realized, before opening it, that FSG was one of the very few publishers to whom I hadn't sent the manuscript ... so my first thought was, "Bummer! They're rejecting me *in advance*. They've heard about my terrible manuscript and now they want to reject it before they ever see it!"

But I was wrong. To my astonishment, it was actually a letter to me—from Madeleine L'Engle. Written on the stationery of FSG, it read: "Dear Tom Barron, I have heard from our mutual friend that you would like to write books, but haven't found any success with publishers. I thought you'd like to know that my book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, was rejected by 42 publishers before it was finally accepted." (My immediate thought was—hey, that's ten more tries! Who knows what might happen?) She went on to say, in a soaring conclusion, "Keep writing, keep trying. And if you persevere, I promise that you, too, will find your voice."

I was ecstatic. The first thing I did was call my friend in Colorado to tell her the good news, but she wasn't at home. So I called ... well, everyone

else I knew. I called my parents, my college roommate, my friends near and far. I even read the letter aloud to the doorman in my apartment building. Finally, I caught up with my friend in Colorado and told her the wonderful news. I jabbered on and on ... but strangely, she was totally silent. So I stopped and asked, “Is anything wrong?” She sighed, then answered, “I just didn’t think you were that gullible.”

That’s right: *forgery*. Major forgery! She had copied the letterhead of the FSG stationery and written the letter—as a joke. A not very funny joke.

I was stunned. For several weeks, I walked around with a dark cloud over my head. Then, one night ... I realized there was, in fact, a silver lining here. Because of this terrible hoax, I now knew the address of one of my favorite writers. So I sat down and wrote her a letter:

“Dear Madeleine L’Engle, This is a thank-you letter—first, for all the wonderful books you have written; and second, for the warm and encouraging letter you wrote me, which is attached. Now, you may not remember writing it, because in fact, you didn’t. But it sure sounded like you. And it gave me exactly the hopeful message I needed. You see, I have always wanted to write books ... but instead, I’m stuck in New York, wearing a business suit. And so if you are ever in New York, I would be deeply honored to take you to lunch.”

Then I added: “P. S. If you *do* answer this letter ... *please* have your signature notarized. I just can’t handle going through all this again.”

Never in a million years did I expect an answer. But it did feel good to write the letter. Three weeks went by. Then, to my surprise, I received a postcard. It read: “Dear Tom Barron, I *live* in New York. Call this number, and let’s have lunch.” Signed: Madeleine L’Engle—*signature notarized*.

We did have lunch—which lasted 7 whole hours. And that began a wonderful friendship for which I’m deeply grateful. Long live serendipity ... and notarized signatures!