

BREAKING IN

Debut authors: How they did it, what they learned, and why you can do it, too.

BY CASSANDRA LIPP

Lisa Braxton



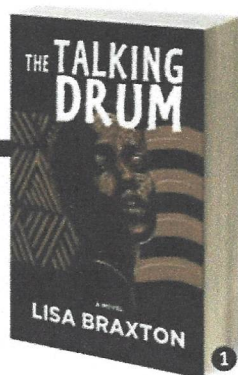
The Talking Drum

(Literary Fiction, May, Inanna Publications)

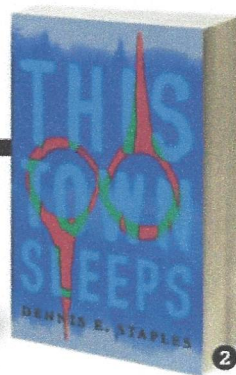
"A story of racial, cultural, class, and political tensions told through three 1970s couples living in a Massachusetts port city in decline, with an urban redevelopment project expected to transform the city economically with gentrification playing a key role."

WRITES FROM: Weymouth, Mass.

PRE-DRUM: I had been writing short stories and essays for years and would occasionally get published. I'd been wanting to write a novel since childhood, and after getting a few publication credits, I crafted a scene featuring a woman who purposely runs into an old boyfriend to rekindle their romance. After several years rewriting the same scene, I needed guidance to further the story. I enrolled in the Southern New Hampshire University low-residency MFA program, where I learned to organize my writing and commit to the discipline and time required to write a full-length manuscript. **TIME FRAME:** I spent two years writing the manuscript as a part of my course requirement for the MFA program. After graduating, I spent six years revising and shopping it around to



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agents. They would ask for sample pages, but would ultimately turn the manuscript down. I came to the conclusion that I needed to rewrite the entire thing with the help of a writing consultant. Discussing the matter with my husband, a lightbulb went off. Years ago, he helped a friend with her manuscript and her book ended up on *The New York Times* best-seller list. I hired him as my consultant and he agreed to work for free!

ENTER THE CONTRACT: After my husband gave me tips on improving the manuscript, I attended the Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference. I went to the book fair to meet representatives of small presses that had turned the manuscript down to see if I could convince them to consider again. Also, I met with every small press publishing novels that was there. There were dozens. Toward the back of the hall was the editor of Inanna Publications. I told her about my novel and she asked me to mail it to her. Months later, she notified me that it had been accepted. **WHAT**

I DID RIGHT: I was relentless in my effort to get the novel published. I got discouraged when I would get a rejection, but after a few days, I'd try again. I'd try a different agent, a different small press. **PLATFORM:** I am one of five debut authors for the 2020 season who are part of The Debutante Ball blog. I've gained many followers through this effort. Through my membership at GrubStreet creative writing center and the Boston chapter of the National Writers Union, I publicize my novel and other writing successes through their newsletters. I'm former president of the Boston chapter of the Women's National Book Association. I've also done some storytelling on stage. **ADVICE FOR WRITERS:** My professor at SNHU advised me to continue revising the manuscript as I was sending it out, taking note of feedback I got from agents and editors. **NEXT UP:** I'm working on a novel taking place in Boston in the 19th century. **WEBSITE:** LisaBraxton.com