

How I Came to Write the Book ~ Vallie Lynn Watson discusses the process of writing *A River So Long*.

Hotel rooms, and fear of the unknown, are essential to the brew of *A River So Long*.

My fascination with hotels long predates my writing life, but it wasn't until I found a childhood friend online recently, and she commented, after updates, "That's great; you've always wanted to be a writer," that I realized I'd finally done what I'd always felt too intimidated to do: I'd written a book.

The first section I wrote towards the novel was published as a flash fiction in *971 Menu* under the same name, "A River So Long," a lyric from Joni Mitchell's "River." It was the summer of 2007, a luxury New Orleans hotel room, an escape from my nearby doctoral program. It stormed, and I sat at the 32nd floor window and watched the river life, the downtown movement, took notes, wrote a tiny story. When I got home I wrote another tiny story, then another, then realized they were starting to build towards a larger narrative.

I was still daunted by the idea of writing a novel, but these small pieces—between a paragraph and a couple pages—were manageable, and before I knew it I had a dozen. And somehow I tricked myself into believing I wasn't writing a novel as the pieces continued to come together, pieces that could no longer always work independently. But thinking in terms of sections, and compiling them to form a larger work made the process seem possible. I didn't even realize it when I stopped considering the parts as fragments, and instead considered them to be chapters, chapters which accumulate into a tale with hazy sense of time and place, which serves to characterize the main character, Veronica.

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