The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of writing and publishing a first novel. Using a phenomenological method, influenced by van Manen (1990), I sought to uncover the meaning of this experience in adults over 40 years old (ages ranged from 40-80) and examined how this influenced their motivation and self-direction. Nine novelists were interviewed. Six of these participants were female and three were male. Of these novelists, six chose to have their novels self-published. One had her novel accepted by a large publishing company, and the two others published their novels through small publishing companies. During data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) influence of the writer’s subject/object orientation; (b) motivation found in story, process, and goals; (c) meaning found in experience and accomplishment; and (d) lessons learned.

In Garrison’s (1997) comprehensive model of self-directed learning, self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation are necessary components for developing into a fully self-directed learner. In this study, self-monitoring was an issue with some of the participants. Developing the ability to seek and to integrate external feedback with internal feedback did not come easily to some of the participants. One self-published novelist, in particular, struggled in
her ability to judge the integrity of the self-publishing company to make decisions in her best interest. The ability to develop self-monitoring skills is especially crucial for authors who choose to self-publish.

When deciding to write a novel, and especially if considering self-publishing, an aspiring author should consider closely his or her reasons for wishing to write and publish the novel to determine a learning plan. Facilitators of writing courses and workshops can help aspiring authors to practice self-monitoring and to assess the differences between their current knowledge and skill levels and their goals, so that they can develop a self-directed plan.