If you're a poet, how are you going to survive if you can't get a teaching job? In *Plan B: A Poet's Survivors Manual*, Sandy McIntosh offers the answer.

Sandy McIntosh's hybrid craft book-memoir *Plan B* is a rollercoaster ride through a life-long writerly career. He takes readers from typewriter days to Chinese cookbooks and on through to book promotion in the social media age. Along the way he imparts gleanings of wisdom about writing and marketing. An unreformed technical writer, he demonstrates how bullet points and dialogue can both contribute to a fascinating narrative.

—DENISE LOW, Kansas Poet Laureate

Being fired from academia only meant this poet enjoyed life more by cooking “authentic” Chinese, teaching the world how to type, lying about the identities of classical Roman poets in travel brochures, and pontificating (for 5 years!) on the world’s biggest media about attending military school with Donald Trump, among other things outside the constricted halls of academia. Poetry is about everything and anything, and Sandy McIntosh lived it! Read and learn from Sandy McIntosh's *Plan B*.

—EILEEN R. TABIOS

When I meet a fellow poet, whether I should or not, I can’t help wondering how they make ends meet. Sandy McIntosh's *Plan B: A Poet's Survivors Manual* is a lithe, engaging autobiography that reveals how one poet has published his poems and pays his bills, honored his life-long vocation as a writer while building a career outside the narrow and often elusive path of a poetry professorship in academia. These energetic narrative episodes are paired with practical craft advice and “survival tips” for poets that really apply to writers of every genre. My favorite tip is this: “No experience no matter how miserable is wasted on a writer.” And clearly, as this book confirms with wit and charm, no experience whatsoever is wasted on Sandy McIntosh.

—JULIE MARIE WADE, author of *Skirted: Poems* and *Just an Ordinary Woman Breathing*

People come to writing in all kinds of ways. In *Plan B: A Poet's Survivors Manual* you will learn about Sandy McIntosh's path. At one point in the book Sandy writes, “My plan B was vague.” I will put my hand up right now and say that my plan B was a void, no plan. I have also had to scramble from time to time so that was probably a mistake. This book might have been called, *Making Sure That You Can Make Rent While Being a Poet or Regular Meals Are a Good Thing, Even for Poets*. What’s true is that very few poets are blessed from childhood with a golden nimbus that lets everyone know that they are the next poetic revelation. McIntosh’s book was, for me, a peek into how someone else navigated that space.

—KIM SHUCK, San Francisco Poet Laureate Emerita
I love time travel stories—and this book offers a trip back to a time and place that seems almost like science-fiction today. Wonderful characters, great surprises, and a sly sense of humor that kept me eagerly turning the pages. —R.L. STINE

Very funny . . . an exquisitely fine sense of a special place and time. —PHILLIP LOPATE

From The East Hampton Star

On A HOLE IN THE OCEAN: A HAMPTONS’ APPRENTICESHIP

Stars-in-the-eyes young poet meets literary and art world icons in the Hamptons. And re-meets and reconsiders. And admires. And continues to honor and to create his own work. A Hole in the Ocean feels very much like the “Hamptons’ Apprenticeship” of its subtitle, with its aha moments and stories of meetings with and musings about the famous and infamous on the East End. Mr. McIntosh notes that Southampton College has long been a magnet for a number of accomplished people. In the late ’60s people such as the performance poet and scholar Charles Matz and the poet David Ignatow, among others, clustered there. —LAURA WELLS

On LESSER LIGHTS:
MORE TALES FROM A HAMPTONS’ APPRENTICESHIP

Lesser Lights is a charming memoir written from that place where art and fact mingle to produce a swift, rollicking read that feels like it must be right . . . Here we meet pugilistic novelists, an oversexed sculptor, and an impractical artist, among others. Mr. McIntosh has crafted a collection of vignettes and a few longer pieces that focus our attention on a Hamptons barely recognizable today. With this collection’s longest piece, “Robert, in Twelve Episodes,” he also appears to challenge the notion of what constitutes the meaning of “memoir” today. —DAN GIANCOLA
Plan B
Also by Sandy McIntosh

POETRY MEMOIRS
A Hole in the Ocean: A Hampton's Apprenticeship
(East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)
Lesser Lights: More Tales from a Hampton's Apprenticeship
(East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)

POETRY COLLECTIONS
Earth Works (Southampton: Long Island University)
Which Way to the Egress? (Garfield Publishers)
Monsters of the Antipodes (Survivors Manual Books)
Endless Staircase (Street Press)
Between Earth and Sky (East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)
Selected Poems of H.R. Hays [editor] (Xlibris)
The After-Death History of My Mother (East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)
Forty-Nine Guaranteed Ways to Escape Death (East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)
237 More Reasons to Have Sex [with Denise Duhamel] (Otoliths)
Ernesta, In the Style of the Flamenco (East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)
Cemetery Chess: Selected and New Poems (East Rockaway: Marsh Hawk Press)

PROSE
The Poets in the Poets-In-the-Schools
(Minnesota: University of Minnesota Center for Social Research)
From a Chinese Kitchen (The American Cooking Guild)
Firing Back [with Jodi-Beth Galos] (John Wiley & Sons)

COMPUTER SOFTWARE
The Best of Wok Talk (Los Angeles: The Software Toolworks)
Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing? (Los Angeles: Electronic Arts)
Lost in Literature (Riverhead: East End Software)
Plan B

A Poet’s Survivors Manual

SANDY McINTOSH

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

This book is non-fiction. The names of some people and businesses have been changed. Renaming persons and businesses may have inadvertently resulted in a description of a real person or business unknown to the author. Any such resemblance is purely coincidental.

Thanks to John Lauderdale Locke, who asked motive questions. Thanks to my editor, Mary Mackey, for her ideas and thoughtful attention. Thanks to Spencer Rumsey and Thomas Fink for their helpful comments. And always thanks to my wife, Barbara.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Mammoth Tours &amp; Travel</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Rental Property</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Wok Talk</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Rental Property</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  The Software Toolworks</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Rental Property</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Sandy Says Noxious Things</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Newsday</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  MTV</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 A Note on My Poetry While All This Was Going On</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Firing Back</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“LET’S DISCUSS YOUR PLANS for this summer’s writing workshops,” the chair of my English Department began. We were seated in his office—me at attention, he reclined in his rocking chair, willowy fingers stroking the marble statue of Dionysus on his desk-top. “Oh!” he said, his face mimicking surprise followed by a veneer of sympathetic concern. “But you won’t be with us this summer, now, will you?”

My face must have betrayed my shock.

“Didn’t I mention that? Well, after all, you’re a part-timer. You’ve done well gathering guest writers for the program: Louis Simpson, David Ignatow, Ai, Kenneth Koch, and those others. We’re appreciative that you’ve helped us create this program, but we think an older, established poet would best represent it to the public. Someone with a national reputation. You understand, of course.”

And just then, at the office door, a poet I recognized from his photograph in recent blockbuster poetry anthology appeared.

The chair said. “Ah! Here he is. Come in. Come in.”

After introductions, the chair sat back. He nodded to my replacement, then to me, and then to the statue of Dionysus, as if seeking an agreement. “Well,” he said. “I think we understand each other, yes?” he said. “I think that will work out quite well.”

As we left the office, they on their way to a restaurant for a cele-
bratory lunch, me to my own devices, the chair called over his shoulder: “And there won’t be a place for you for the fall semester. Sorry. It didn’t work out.”

I’m calling this book a poet’s “survivors manual” because it’s the result of a lifetime of my own discoveries in the writing world outside of academia. In learning these techniques, I more than once made an idiot of myself, which I didn’t enjoy at the time, but now that the wounds have healed, I’ve come to appreciate their value.

After I lost my first college teaching job, there was plenty of self-recrimination, of course. How had I brought this upon myself? How had I stirred up the chairman’s wraith, bitterness, sadistic nature, whatever? Or did he just fire me the way he did because he had the power to—because he could?

Eventually, I realized that it didn’t really matter.

Whether an adjunct professor is let go gently, politely or any other way, an adjunct teaches at the pleasure of the department. And with MFAs and PH.D. s in the arts proliferating, it’s a buyers’ market. While I’ve taught in universities where the adjunct professors were as academically qualified as the tenured professors, in economic terms (which is how the university administration considers hirings), the adjunct is a cheap commodity—often drifting without university-sponsored health care and no retirement provisions—easily traded and expendable. That’s the reality.

The most important thing for an adjunct is to have a Plan B, an eye on an alternate career. What’s to be done if a full-time position never opens for you?

I considered the lives of my mentors who influenced me: the poets, David Ignatow and H.R. Hays. The painters, Willem de Kooning and Ilya Bolotowsky. Many others I’ve written about elsewhere.
I'd met most in a university classroom. Each arrived at the university after years of artistic effort coupled with unglamorous years in business—Ignatow in his father’s Lower East Side book bindery, Hays writing early television adaptations, de Kooning painting roadside billboards, Bolotowsky designing fabric. Why should I, a young guy right out of a cloistered life (six years of military school, ten years of undergraduate and graduate work), pretend to be worthy of a tenured teaching position without putting in the grunt time of my mentors?

I wanted to follow in the lives I watched my mentors living. I thought I was already living that ideal and had been since beginning college. Of course, a college student whose food and housing are paid for by others is only tasting that life without having to do the unpleasant, working-at-some-job part to pay for it.

To me, a successful poet’s life meant being a poet first. Being a teacher or worker was a distant second. Some of us at the time believed that you could be a professional poet. Certainly, there were modestly paid Poets in the Schools programs, reading residencies and series that could maintain you, book launch parties and writers’ colonies, such as Yaddo and MacDowell, that offered occasional sustenance. One could live, or, at least, one could get along. But when I lost my teaching job, that vision disappeared, overcome by the unwelcome reality that, if I wanted to put food on the table, wear shoes without holes in the soles, and stop living with roommates before I turned sixty I would have to resort to my Plan B.

But my Plan B was vague.

In addition to having to support myself, I was pressured by the fact that I had recently married a Disco singer just starting to travel with a new band. Also, along with my younger brother, I had inherited a small compound of moribund rental cottages and outbuild-
nings in need of immediate and expensive rebuilding before they could be rented for profit. Added to that, I was aware that successfully managing a rental business would require my presence much of the time, thus limiting my geographical reach for potential teaching jobs to the hyper-competitive New York area.

I began by assessing myself. What were my employable assets outside of academia? I doubted that the business world would appreciate my poetry MFA and Ph.D.

Additionally, I realized that the idea of working in some company office alarmed me. After those years in military school, I could certainly follow a superior’s orders. But I feared that in order to produce my best work I could only do it in my own place and on my own time.

On the positive side, I was becoming an experienced journalist, having spent three years’ editing my undergraduate college’s weekly newspaper.

When I came on, the campus weekly was being run by a Viet Nam vet who might have been suffering from what he called shell-shock, but what we now refer to as PTSD. Whatever it was, the newspapers he produced were riots of color, bizarre photographs, and non-sensical articles. At one point, he got tired of putting out the paper, threw up his hands and turned it over to me. I was able to spin it into a respectable sixteen-page weekly that reported campus news and whatever else I wanted to report. Working on the paper gave me experience with reportage, layout, design, selling and writing advertisements, and distribution, all the while being happy to figure things out on my own as I went along. I had learned to make quick, practical decisions to put out the paper each week and to keep it editorially in focus.

During a summer vacation interning in a printing plant, I
had added more practical graphic design skills, learning how to paste-up type and correct film negatives that were used in making offset printing plates. I had even been taught to run the presses. Surely, if nothing else, I could find a job calling for writing and graphic art skills.

Above all, I promised myself, I would find a job that would allow me to continue to write my own poetry.

Reflecting on these personal interests guided me to land my first non-teaching job.

Poets hesitant to consider making their living in some pursuit other than teaching, may imagine that the outside business world is crude and usurious, and always unappreciative of their writing abilities. Certainly, there are jobs that call for writing by less-than-competent writers, judging by their outcomes. For example, instruction manuals that explain the workings of some invention are often included with the merchandise as after-thoughts. To short-sighted businesses, the product itself is most important and the instructions for using it are not important enough to justify hiring a trained technical writer. Most everyone has had the experience of trying to follow instructions written by people who don’t seem to know the language in which they are trying to write.

Happily, however, there are businesses that are not short-sighted and demand excellence in the products they produce, which includes excellence in the instructions put out with the product. Some of these writing jobs pay surprisingly well—I know because I’ve worked in them.

Adding the skills of a business, travel, or technical writer to one’s own repertoire of literary abilities is something that can be done rapidly because you’ve devoted yourself to the basics. Likewise,
the writing skills that I learned mastering the diverse work that I’ve been called to do fit well atop the foundation of my ability to write poetry, odd as this might seem.

**SURVIVAL TIP:** When considering a *Plan B*, assess your present interests and skills and reject others for which you have no enthusiasm. In this way, you’ll map your surest route forward.