

## **The Writer Within – Embolden Your Writer with a Plan**

### **Column Three: Let Me Look into That – Part One**

*By Janice Alonso*

Your idea box is overflowing with photos, napkins, and note cards, and your notebook has more scribbled-on pages than blank ones. Ideas are wonderful and the more the merrier is my attitude, so be sure to continually tuck away those thoughts. However, an idea is only an idea. It needs development to become a viable work that will stand on its own.

This is the point at which I feel the majority of beginning writers go astray. They have an idea and then take it straight to the computer. After a few pages the story loses its momentum and the writer has no fuel in reserve to keep it running. Before an idea is ready to become a story, it needs more substance and support.

The researching stage will give your writer within the opportunity to explore more deeply an idea's potential. This stage will also reveal other avenues in which you can present your idea or various scenarios in which to highlight and develop a storyline. During the research stage you will want to study possible markets for your idea. Investigating possible places to submit your completed manuscript will alert you upfront as to each publication's requirements. All this information will give your idea a framework in which to blossom, much like an artist must decide on the form and colors in which he/she will present an artistic conception.

The research stage is so important, so I've divided the topic into two parts. In part one we will look at possible ways to nourish the idea itself; in part two we will look at ways to showcase an idea.

Many writers incorporate related information to strengthen an idea. One of my ideas came in a conversation with my mother. She talked about a group in her neighborhood that collected plastic shopping bags, cut them into strips, and then knitted the strips into sleeping mats for homeless people. At first I laughed, but the idea intrigued me so I searched the Internet. (In the end, the laugh was on me. It is a wonderful project.)

I found several articles about this project as well as a YouTube video demonstrating how to make a mat. The video listed all the materials needed and provided information such as how many bags are needed to make one mat and the proper way to cut and roll a ball of “parn.” (“Parn” is a combination of the words plastic and yarn.) I also did research about homeless shelters, the number of homeless in America, and the number of homeless around the world. Having these facts gave me a better understanding of how to present this project in a story. It also gave my stories credibility. I say “stories” because I wrote two pieces from the same information. One is a devotional for adults and the other is a children’s story. One has a Christian takeaway while the other story’s message is about working as a community to help others through recycling and caring for those who are less fortunate. Both were published. In columns seven and eight I will share these two stories with you.

I also use quotations, anecdotes, and jokes to complement an idea. When I write a devotional, I read the Bible to find a verse of scripture that will reinforce my story’s message. Personal experiences, mine or those related to me, help to illustrate an idea in action. Personal experiences are good ways to get your readers to identify with what you are writing. In my columns for the GWA Website I share with you methods I’ve tried that have brought success. I hope that something I say will strike a chord of a similar situation you’ve had. Because you identify with *my* personal experience example, I’m hoping as a writer you’ll be “drawn in” as *my* reader.

Research is a vital part of the total writing process. I find it fun, informative, and oftentimes the research sparks more ideas to cluster with my original idea. It is during this stage I have realized that an idea I thought was wonderful turned out to be just an idea. It was a decent idea; it just wasn’t strong enough to sustain a story. But don’t give up on these “light weight” ideas. Often I will combine several smaller ideas to create a larger work. I’ve also used what I thought would be a great main plot as a minor or subplot in a longer story. All ideas can be useful; your writer within just needs experience in how to recognize and utilize each idea’s potential.

*Step Three: Select ideas from your toolboxes and infuse them with research.*