

The Writer Within – Embolden Your Writer with a Plan

Article Two: Hey, I've Got an Idea!

By Janice Alonso

Every story, book, play, movie, television show, painting, song . . . you name it . . . began as an idea. Great inventions, beautiful clothes, successful businesses . . . need I go on . . . were once a spark in someone's imagination. The key to writing is to take these ideas and learn how to develop them into completed and viable works that will stand on their own merit.

For this second series of columns, I'm going to assume you've read the first set of columns and followed each step. This means I will try not to repeat key writing points we addressed previously. I want to keep this series fresh with new information. Your writer within now as a designated time and place in which to work, and is writing every day. Perhaps you've been blogging or journaling. What you write is not so important as the fact you *are* writing. By engaging in this daily practice, your writing muscles are now warmed and pumped and ready to get down to a serious, planned workout that will result in beautifully sculpted stories.

We will now add idea-gathering sessions to your writing routine. We will look at how to constructively use and build an idea holder. I have used two kinds of idea holders: a small, spiral notebook and a box. Over the years I've come to use both. The notebook I carry in my purse; the box I keep on my desk at home. I use three types of idea-gathering sessions.

The first is a short meditative, mind-wandering session. I begin most days with a devotion and prayer. When I was in graduate school with a newborn I used to set my clock to rise an hour to two hours before my son awoke. I used this time to study and work on assignments. It was my freshest time of the day. After graduation I kept up this practice of rising early. It was peaceful and often the only part of the day I could truly call my own. As my desire to write became stronger, I found I was my most productive and I came up with the best ideas.

During these times I have no set agenda. I allow my eyes to wander outside, my ears to turn up the volume on the sounds of nature, and set free my senses of taste, touch, and smell to work to heighten their awareness as to what is surrounding me. At some point my mind roams. You'd be amazed what bubbles to the forefront. I don't interrupt these thoughts to write them down, rather I wait until the end and then jot down these thought fragments and musings on note cards to remind me of them later. I place the cards in my idea box.

There is another type of idea gathering time, totally unscheduled, when ideas literally "fall into my lap." Most of my best stories have evolved from the serendipitous occasions. These ideas I jot down in the notebook I carry, on a scrap of paper, or even on a napkin. I also take pictures with my phone. I never take the risk of trying to remember it for later on. All I need is a word, phrase, or visual to spark the memory.

The third type idea-gathering is one of my favorite writing time experiences. These are planned idea-gathering ventures. Last week I took my mother to the hospital for a CT scan and I knew I'd be waiting for awhile, so I took out my notebook and listened to conversations, studied people, and let my senses be receptive to hospital sounds, smells, and sights. Often I'll go to a park, coffee shop, or anywhere to get a nudge for ideas that use times, places, situations, and characters. Ideas come from many sources, not just events or things. Time and place are important elements of fiction and can spark lovely mental settings for a story to take root. Real life scenarios that unfold around us and the people involved in these situations provide fodder for plots and characters in fiction. Many of my devotionals and Christian short stories have come from arriving at church early to sit quietly and listen to our beautiful music.

Ideas are everywhere and are free for the taking. Every idea has potential: all it needs is to be recognized and nurtured. Do not be stingy with your idea-gathering time, and when your box and notebook can't hold another idea – start a second one!

Step two: Get your writer a box and a notebook and begin filling them with ideas.