

The Writer Within – Embolden Your Writer with a Plan

Article Seven: A Tale of Two Stories – Tale One

By Janice Alonso

Idea time – “Sleep Mat-ters” is the nonfiction story based on the idea that “fell into my lap” while talking with my mother one day. I mulled over what she had told me and decided this would make a great personal experience/devotional piece. I also remembered a Bible scripture about people having different talents.

Research time – I looked up several Bible verses, selecting Romans 12:4-6. Now I had a message: No matter your talents, you can serve Jesus. I did an Internet search about the mat and found a YouTube video providing useful information. I read related information concerning homelessness. Finally, I looked for possible publishing markets.

Writing time – I sat down and wrote the story. I set it up exactly as I said in column five. I typed in the scripture and related the story exactly as it happened until the first draft was complete.

Organizing time – I created a folder for “Sleep Mat-ters,” typing a page with possible publishing markets and a page where I would track the story once it was submitted.

I spent my writing sessions after that on editing and rewriting. I looked at word choices, sentence structures, rhythm, plus the many other components of tightening and producing a readable story. This is the final draft published by *Victory Herald* in its April 2012 issue:

Sleep Mat-ters

For just as each of us has one body with many members,
and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we,
though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

Romans 12:4-6

A few months back my mother asked if I would help her collect plastic bags. Even though I have my own reusable bags, I often forget to take them with me inside the store and end up with a supply of these bags from the grocery, drug, and department stores. I keep them in a box and return them to the recycling receptacle outside the grocery store. I told her I'd be happy to give them to her instead. I then asked why she wanted them.

“There's a group in my neighborhood that crochets them into sleeping mats.” She shrugged. “Since I've never been any good at needlework, I told them I'd help collect the bags.”

I laughed and asked, “What do they do with these mats?”

“They give them to their church and then the church takes them to homeless shelters.”

The smile slid slowly from my face as I thought this through.

“They use about 700 to 900 bags to make one mat,” she continued through my pondering. “So they need lots of bags.”

“Boy, that is a lot of bags. Must take a lot of time, too.”

She nodded. “It does, but most of my friend's group can't move around like they used to, so they enjoy getting together and doing something that helps others.”

I went home and did a little research. Sure enough, I found several stories about groups like the one in my mother's neighborhood. Each mat is about two and a half feet wide by six feet long. It is made with a pocket for storage and a band to wrap around the mat that hooks over the shoulder, making it easily portable. I also read there are over 600,000 homeless in the United States and over 100,000 million homeless around the world.

Basically, the plastic bags are folded flat, and the top and bottom ends are cut off. The remaining section is cut into strips. The strips are tied at the ends, rolled into a ball of parn (combination of the words “plastic” and “yarn”), and then the strips are crocheted into a mat. The complete instructions are simple and can be obtained online.

As I continued to read about this project, I realized the laugh was on me. Think about it:

- The project is practically cost free. All you need are scissors and a crochet hook to get started.
- The homeless get a mat that is durable and dries quickly. In countries where no shelters are available and people must stay outdoors, the mats make sleeping more comfortable and are bug resistant.
- The project provides a way to recycle and lend help to others at the same time.
- Anyone or group can participate in this project.

I realize the more important issue here is homelessness and we should always strive to end this problem. There are many worthy organizations that can use our support. In the mean time, this is a simple way we can use our hands and hearts to serve Jesus Christ, no matter our age, talents, or limitations.

The End