

We had a writer's retreat recently and I went down for the day to hear the imported speaker. I thought it wouldn't hurt to get the perspective from someone new even though I've been writing a lot longer than she has. Hey, I've been writing a lot longer than most people. But that doesn't mean I know it all. Far from it. For one thing, this business is constantly changing. And if you don't keep up, you're going to be left behind. It's also good to just be around other writers. Sitting in your chair in front of a computer can make you feel like your writing is going nowhere. Frankly, being around beginning writers made me happy to know I was farther along. I know, that was mean, but sometimes we forget to celebrate our achievements.

But, wait a minute, that's not the point of this article. The point is that the struggle never stops so you'd better pay attention to what's going on around you. You'd think once you got the first contract it would be smooth sailing. If only. I've sold thirteen books and lucky thirteen will be published in December. I've hit best seller lists. But right now I'm trying to figure out what to write next. Some of you are saying right now: "I wish I had her problems." Oh, really? Do you? Because the issue of getting the next contract is just as real as getting the first one. Worrying why your agent hasn't read your latest submission. Worrying why your editor isn't coming back with an offer. Wondering if you've lost the magic that made your last book a laugh riot. Those are real and pressing concerns.

Think back to the authors whose books you loved in times past. Are they still writing? I'll bet not all of them are. There are some who have had long and illustrious careers. Some authors keep cranking out the same kinds of stories to greater success each year. Those are the exceptions. Seriously. Yes, there are phenoms who can write and sell anything successfully. But look around. Many writers reinvent themselves in an effort to keep a career alive. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I'm trying to decide: stick with funny paranormals, go dark or go back to straight contemporary which is where I started.

I could quit writing altogether but I'm sure I'd miss it. Not the angst. But the company of writers. Some of them have become my best friends. And there's nothing like the rush of seeing your book on the shelves or getting an email from a fan. Also I have these stories in my head. If I don't write, then I'd have to admit I'm a little bit, or a lot, crazy. So I hit the retreat and listened to a basic review of writing tips from a nice person who is also struggling with what she wants to write next. I learned that I'm not alone in my identity crisis. Which was comforting.

And it didn't hurt for me to hear a few things that I need to remember when I sit down to start a new story. She talked about voice and I've always had a strong one. It was a good reminder that whatever I write, I need to let that voice shine through. It was what helped me sell my current series and what will help me land a new contract. I have to believe there will be one. If I don't have confidence in myself, who will? So I learned something that day in Galveston. I even got a story idea while listening to the other authors talk. Now I'm plowing ahead and hoping for the best. I hope you are too.

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