

## **A Lucky Lady Tells How She Discovered Herself as a Writer**

From the August 2010 Write Brain

Presenter: Deborah Coonts

Article by Michael Shepherd

It's not often that a woman begins a conversation with, "So, you wanna get lucky?" It's even less frequent that she encourages audience participation. Yet for a standing-room-only crowd of Pikes Peak Writers at the August Write Brain session, Deborah Coonts, author of the breakout novel, *Wanna Get Lucky?*, did exactly that—to thunderous applause.

A longtime friend of many Pikes Peak Writers members, Deb focused her lecture on helping writers discover their own writing style. She outlined her personal writer's journey, bouncing from genre to genre, looking for the story she wanted to tell. Along the way, her first manuscript, an international espionage thriller with a splash of romance, never made it past her desk drawer and, in her heart, it will never leave there. As she stated, "I would rather have naked pictures of myself on the Internet than have anyone read it." Contrary to this proclamation, she politely declined all photographic requests.

Deciding to follow the sage advice "write what you know," she next leaned upon her experience as a tax law attorney and penned a legal thriller. While she was happier with the quality of her second effort, she knew in her heart it wasn't her true calling. It wasn't until she relied on her experience writing a humor column for an aviation magazine that she finally hit her stride—and found her muse in the form of wise-cracking, tough yet vulnerable Lucky O'Toole.

She urged other writers to do the same. "Don't just follow someone else's guidelines, or what they believe you should write. Learn who you are and know what you're drawn to, and write that. Find your voice, and tell your story the way you want it told. Then trust your gut--and find a good critique group. With Lucky, when I started writing about her, her voice rang in my ear and I couldn't wait to get to the computer every day. Sometimes it even hit in the middle of the night, and I couldn't help but write when Lucky and the gang whispered to me."

While crafting Lucky, Deb bound and gagged her inner-critic/editor and threw her in a closet. "I didn't want to censor myself. I decided to let myself fly and allow my sense of humor to dribble onto the pages. Lucky is a smartass. I like that. She talks to the reader--I like that, too. I have a male romantic lead who wears a dress for a living. For that alone I was sure I would get a lifetime ban from the romance genre, but I guess finding a guy who is all man but who also is sensitive and kind and fluent in Jimmy Choo isn't only MY fantasy."

People often ask Deb if she is like Lucky. "I guess we all have had misadventures once we reach a certain age, and Lucky is no different. I find it interesting to dissect Lucky's relationships. Obviously her adventure isn't mine, nor her friends and lovers patterned after real people. However, some of her thoughts and the choices she makes are based on my experience. In some ways Lucky is who I want to be. She is kind, non-judgmental, hardworking and loyal. However, I don't want her sex life. Her job maybe, but not her sex life."

Deb reminded listeners that writing guidelines are really no more than suggestions, and once they understand point of view and basic writing skills, they should throw away the how-to book. “As a writer, all of us started as voracious readers. As such, we have developed an intrinsic understanding of stories, their pacing, when suspense is right, and when the narrative gets in the way of the story. This is how we develop our craft.”

As she developed her own craft, she also learned to re-shape her definition of success. Initially, it was simply stringing a few sentences together into a readable chapter. Subsequently, success became the ability to connect multiple chapters together. Then she raised the bar to writing a complete novel. The next qualifier became producing a novel others would read without resorting to guilt trips and arm twisting. “Then, finally, I was able to define success by writing a good story in the best way I knew how. When it was done, and I held the manuscript in my hands, I knew I did my best. That was success to me.”

Her hope for her readers is simple. “I want them to have had a fun time. I want their load to be a bit lighter. And I want them to feel they have met some folks and made some friends they would like to spend more time with.”

Given the warm reception she received, the full house at Pikes Peak Writers felt the same way about Deb Coonts.

*Originally appeared as "Lucky Lady" in The Pikes Peak Writer, Volume IX, Issue 5, September 2010.*