

My Best Writing Year Ever

By Bonnie Hagan

Quite honestly, time baffles me. I'm pretty sure that about five minutes after my husband and I shoved our crates of Christmas decorations into the crawl space, we were dragging them back out again. And since time seems to accelerate the longer I live, I'm certain one year I'm going to get halfway through undecorating and just stop, icicle lights in hand, and start putting everything back up.

It's obvious to me the months don't trickle by lazily. No. They gush past, leaving me shocked while another year bleeds out and expires. So last January when I attended the PPW Write Brain titled "Your Best Writing Year Ever," I felt more than a smidge of desperation. After all, I'd seen enough years roll by, and I'd started to have serious doubts that my annual pep talks were ever going to result in real change.

2008 ended that cycle.

What would be really cool right now is if I said that the Write Brain conducted by the talented Cynthia Morris eliminated my problems and changed me overnight into the most successful writer in the world. Or the country. Or even just Colorado, I'm not picky. That's not even remotely what happened.

I did walk out of the workshop armed with goals and some new ideas. I collected organizational tips and motivational tricks along with all the resources PPW can offer—and let me tell you this group offers a lot! But all the tools and preparation in the Milky Way weren't going to make me a writer.

So what happened? How did I go from talking to myself about writing and playing around with little projects that never got anywhere to completing my first draft of a novel? How did I manage to meet my goals instead of just wishing I could meet them?

Quite simply, I stared at a clock. Seriously.

I highly recommend this activity. Find a clock. Preferably an easy-to-read analog clock with a red second hand like the ones in the classrooms of every school in the nation. Park yourself in front of it and stare. For a few minutes, nothing remarkable happens. You start to tell yourself it's just a clock and you see clocks every day, but after awhile you notice something unsettling about the super-thin second hand. It doesn't stop. It never pauses at the top and says, "Whew! Made it. Now I can take it easy." It measures second after second after second, and there is no end to the seconds. And if you are very still, and you have any kind of imagination whatsoever, you realize your entire existence is subdivided into these ridiculous segments of time.

Seconds. Minutes. Hours. Days. Weeks. Months. Years. The only thing keeping them from running together is that thin hand of the clock.

Watching that clock terrified me more than a purple dinosaur singing a catchy song to preternaturally gleeful children. But it also lit my pants on fire and permanently changed my perspective. When Cynthia Morris talked about my best writing year ever, I thought about having the best writing month ever, or the best writing day ever. I evaluated time from a completely different standpoint. A year was just a measure of seconds strung together, and my year was going to precisely consist of what I spent those seconds doing. If I wanted to write, I had to spend some seconds writing. I'm talking a major dedication of seconds.

If I spent my seconds elsewhere, then when December came around, I'd be once more trying to convince myself that the work would magically complete itself next year. Somehow.

I'll put it another way. I can't work on my writing yesterday anymore than I can work on my writing tomorrow. All I have is the bizarre point in the space-time continuum that we call the present. Now.

I have now, and that is the entirety of what I have. Not every now can be about writing, otherwise my husband and I would starve and our clothes would never be washed and don't even get me started on the sleep deprivation. But it turns out that Benjamin Franklin was right: "Time is the stuff life is made of."

Provided I make it to the end of 2009, I will have used another 31,536,000 seconds. I have my goals, my plans, my little tricks, and of course I have PPW to give me some oomph. But in reality, all I have is now.

Was 2008 my best writing year ever? Absolutely.

But that's not an ending. The exciting thing for me is that every year can be my best writing year ever. Even if it seems the year passes in a blur from the holidays to the holidays, it still has the same number of seconds as every other year.

So, Happy New Year! Make it your best writing year ever.

Originally appeared in The Pikes Peak Writer, Volume VIII, Issue 1, January 2009