

I came. I saw. I wrote.

Tips, Tools, and Tricks for the Tenacious Writer

By Sharon Ledwith

Forward...

It begins with INTENT. Back when I started blogging, I was so green and didn't have much to offer writers or even knew what to say. I was scared, insecure, and filled with tons of self-doubt. BUT I moved forward with tenacity and embraced the desire to be a published author, and dare I say, *Bestselling* author. I've built my blog, and my writing career brick by brick, word by word until I've amassed quite a collection of helpful and heartfelt content to assist anyone who is remotely interested in delving into the murky, yet exciting world of writing and all the challenges a writer might face. Today, I still have a long way to go, but I'm definitely on the right track with my goals and aspirations as a young adult author.

It is my hope that you find the following compiled content insightful, inspiring, and illuminating as you begin your writing journey or just need some tips, tools, or tricks to help you shine in this crazy publishing business. All the best. All the success.

In the Beginning: Posts from May 4th, 2011 to May 2014...

All Systems Go...

First, let me introduce myself—my name is Sharon Ledwith and I write young adult fiction. My genres include: time travel mysteries (kind of like a mesh of fantasy with a splash of sci-fi meets Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys), as well as paranormal stories where teens deal with psychic powers like psychometry, telekinesis, animal communication—stuff like that.

My intention of this blog is to:

#1 Get you to know me as a writer, and post my experiences as an indie publisher of eBooks.

#2 Introduce and showcase my stories and characters.

In a nutshell—market myself and promote my work.

That's it really. You see, writing is all about the reader. My goal is to influence and empower today's youth—the next generation—through the stories I create. I believe everyone is here at this time with a mission and a purpose, and every child has something to add to our evolutionary advancement. Children truly are the keys to our future. It is my hope to unlock this portal.

To Grow or Not To Grow...

I am a dinosaur. I freely admit it. No, no, not the kind with fangs and scales—although my kids may have something to say about that—I'm talking about keeping up with the times. Technology is my biggest and scariest hurdle. It is harsh, unknown territory, and yet without computers, the internet, social networks, texting—I could go on, but you get the drift—there would be no growth, no challenges for our wonderful evolving lives. And let's face it technology DOES make our lives a heck of a lot easier! Dinosaurs had to make way for humanity (actually, they had no choice in the matter), and so, I too must bow to the changes and challenges technology offers OR become like the scaly beasts of the past and disappear forever.

Enter this blog.

In some future blog posts I'll give one of my characters this platform by interviewing them—even the evil ones—so you get to know and understand what makes him or her tick. I intend to self e-Publish in the near future, so you'll be able to upload my first book, *The Last Timekeepers and the Arch of Atlantis* on your e-Reader if you enjoyed what you've been perusing on this blog. There will also be a print-on-demand option for those who'd rather read a traditional book. Other titles in my time travel adventure series will follow, as well as titles from my teen psychic mystery series, Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls.

E-Books seem to be the new wave of publishing and today's youth are crazy-mad for the next electronic gadget or techno device that enters the market place. So it's time for me to grit my teeth and take that leap of faith into the future. After all, if my characters aren't afraid to travel into the past or deal with mysterious ways, then what's stopping me from moving forward?

An Offer You Can't Refuse...

What does an author have to offer?

Good question. I guess it depends on what the reader is looking for. Of course, that's different for everyone. Some readers love romance. Others are hard-core sci-fi, fantasy or horror fans. Mystery grabs many readers' attention, while graphic novels are being slowly digested by the thousands. Readers are diverse and story-tellers need to have a wide assortment of books to meet their appetites. So authors offer what they know. It's as simple and as complex as that.

Sometimes authors dip into their past lives and pull out nuggets of wisdom. Some delve into the unknown. Others shine light into subjects so dark and ominous it forces people to look at things differently. Authors experiment constantly – 'what if' becomes their staple thought, the start to a good story or the birth of an unforgettable character. Observation becomes the writer's super power and sometimes their kryptonite.

So what do I, as an author, have to offer?

That's easy. The sum total of my experiences presented through my imagination.

10,000 Hours...

It takes about 10,000 hours to acquire any skill. Imagine that. 10,000 hours. Break it down and that's 250 straight 40 hour work weeks. I believe it. I don't exactly know what 'hour count' I'm at in my writing career, but I know it's a hell of a lot more than 10,000 hours.

I also know that between the years 1995 and 2011 I have definitely developed the skill for storytelling. Fifteen years ago, I didn't possess this skill. I could create a story in my mind, but translating these thoughts into structure, dialogue, plot, characters, scenes, conflicts, and climaxes was a pretty hard gig. It took practice and more practice. And it took a lot of perseverance and patience. I learnt all I could about the craft of writing through college courses, correspondence courses, workshops, my writing group, a supportive literary agent, an editor, beta readers, self-help books and the internet. And I'm still learning. The *process* of writing a good book never ends. A book people would read. A book I can be proud of.

So remember, if you're in the midst of developing new skills, cut yourself some slack. Rome wasn't built in a day.

Writers, Know Your Why...

Do you know your 'Why'? This 'Why' I'm talking about is your passion—the reason you get up in the morning, your reason for living. I have a huge picture on my writing studio wall of a whale breaking the surface. The caption underneath is as follows: *"Passion is powerful...nothing was ever achieved without it, and nothing can take its place. No matter what you face in life, if your passion is great enough, you will find the strength to succeed. Without passion, life has no meaning. So put your heart, mind and soul into even your smallest acts...this is the essence of passion. This is the secret to life."* And you thought that the *Secret* was just about the power of attraction! Ha!

After the 'Why' comes 'How'. How do you communicate your passion to your audience, listeners, readers, workers, clients or customers? By forging connections, that's how. People need to feel what you feel, believe what you believe and want what you want. Once you forge the right connections, you're halfway there.

Then the 'What' follows. This is your end product; in my case it's a book, but I'm talking about anything you're passionate about. It's the actual vehicle where your audience will interact with you. The possibilities are endless. It could be a song, a movie or a painting. What about an organization you've desperately wanted to start? Or a club you've wanted to begin based on your favorite hobby? Don't be afraid to connect your dots and make it happen!

Remember, everyone's 'Why, How and What' is different. What you do, How you do it, and Why you do it are the keys to finding your unique 'voice'. Find yours.

Think Big. Act Small...

Writers have something to say or they wouldn't write. I remember coming out as a 'writer'—actually saying to someone that I wanted to write a book. You know what the response was? *"Ah, you have something to say."* No, I thought. I just had a great story in my head. Plus, I wanted to earn some extra money. That was back in 1995. How little I knew then. How naïve.

Writing, the process of writing, getting a book out, seeing it published, is not about the writer. It never was, never will be. Originally, I had made it about me. About the kudos, the book tours, the fame, the fortune. That is the farthest thing from the truth. The truth is it's never about the writer. It's about what the writer has to say—the extraction of words forming into sentences, then into chapters, then finally into a story with a beginning, middle and end. Writers are just channels for something bigger than us. The story is the end product. The author's baby. It's the

journey of writing the story—the blood, sweat and tears—the push, push, push, that gives it life and gives it a voice. It's carrying around something of value inside of you until you're ready to let it go, let it be. Authors are the keepers of stories. They come to us, and we must care for them. Then, we must give our stories away when they are needed.

This is thinking big, but acting small. Knowing you're only a humble channel, as vessel to hold a story inside of you for a little while, until it grows big enough and strong enough to come out. The point is a story never really belongs to us. It belongs to everyone. And it should be shared.

So, if you think have something to say. Chances are, you probably do. Share it.

Know Your Strengths (and Weaknesses)...

I've come to terms. I've realized that I can't do it all. And if I try to do it all, there's a big mess to clean up later and I feel like a failure. I had to learn to leave well enough alone, and just do what I do best. Most people know their strengths—what they're good at, what they excel at. We try to hide our weaknesses under the rug, like an unwanted part of ourselves that we're ashamed of. But our weaknesses are part of us, and should be acknowledged. This is what makes us human, and allows other people to carry the ball for us by using their strengths.

When I was checking out all there was to learn and digest about uploading my books as ebooks to on-line bookstores such as Amazon or Smashwords, I didn't realize the work involved in doing the task. It was daunting, but I was determined. Too much information filtered through my mind until my head was ready to explode. I knew what I was good at—writing. I loved all the aspects of storytelling—the researching, planning, preparing, setting up, creating characters, and organizing the content of a story. I realize writing (at least if you're looking to get published) is a business. I also know that there are many hats to wear during the publishing process. Editing, cover book art, marketing, formatting and conversion, financing, proof reading, fact checking to name a few, are all part of that process. And I know what I'm good at, and what I'm not good at enough to know when to pass the baton to the next person who can help me get my book(s) in the hands of readers. I guess that's really why I decided to submit my manuscript to a publishing company who handles both ebooks and traditional books. I realized I couldn't take on more than I could handle or my productivity and quality would suffer. In the long run it was better for me to delegate responsibility wisely in order to get the job done. I owe it to my readers.

So remember to acknowledge your strengths and embrace your weaknesses. Trust me. You'll feel so much lighter and happier for doing so.

Act the Part...

What if you had a genie appear and grant you your wish/desire/goal right now? It didn't matter what the wish/desire/goal was. Maybe you want to start your own business, or perhaps graduate from a course you've wanted to take, or even sign a multi-book contract and get on the New York Times Bestseller list (grin). It doesn't matter what you've dreamed of. What if you had whatever it was that you've wanted NOW? Right this moment, in the present.

How would you act?

This may take some time to ponder, but say all your obstacles are out of the way, and what you want, what you've always dreamed of having/being/doing is there for the taking. Take it and feel how you would feel as if it is yours. Use your imagination, visualize until you've got what you've always wanted. Fake it until you make it. There. Can you feel it? Does it feel real to you?

Acting the part sends powerful commands to your subconscious mind to find creative ways to achieve your goals. So when you're thinking like, talking like, dressing like, acting like and feeling like the person who has already achieved your goal, you've set yourself up for success by already being where you want to be. And that's a good place to be.

Now...where was I? Oh, yes, outlining my third book for The Last Timekeepers series.

Remember: *Believe and act as if it were impossible to fail* – Charles F. Kettering (inventor)

In for the Long Haul...

Ask yourself this question—Which one project or activity, if you did in an excellent and timely fashion, would have the greatest positive input on your life? This takes some foresight. Having long-term perspective can be hard to understand, especially for people who haven't learned the benefits and teachings of patience and perseverance. Visualize your future five, ten, even twenty years ahead. What do you see? Do you have a clear path? Or are things blurry?

When you're in for the long haul you realize that it takes slow and steady growth to establish any kind of endeavor worth working toward. Hard work, persistent effort, practical skill and patience are some of the main ingredients it takes to make your goal(s) pay off. Long term projects, whether writing a book series, starting a business, saving for retirement or attending school, need constant attentive nurturing, assessment and planning in order to create positive input into your life. In other words, to reap what you have sown.

Being in for the long haul allows for breathing space—to reassess and reevaluate your progress—to decide what you still need to do to accomplish your goal, and once done, apply consistent effort until you succeed. This is the difference between short term goals and long term goals—the bigger the investment, the bigger the payoff.

Remember: Focus on what you enjoy and build for the long haul!

Chunk It Down...

Time management. Those dreaded words linger at the back of my mind, pushing against the front of my skull until I can't ignore the pressure anymore. Due dates, revisions, planning new novels, blogs to write, marketing research, Facebook, and Twitter. I pull out my trusty planner and attempt to jot down whatever needs to be done for the next day. While plotting a course for my day, I take several detours, until I'm back on track to do some work on my time travel novel. I huff and puff and sigh. An author in these times has to wear many hats—especially when organizing the aspects of his or her writing career.

So, I slip on my 'time management' hat, and instantly know what I have to do. Chunk it down! I must organize my writing into small, easy to handle chunks. Make notes. Brainstorm. Find the

best times that work for me. Get rid of the gunk in my head. And if I need to clear my head—exercise, walk the dog, dance—give my brain a chance to process the information. Then write.

Of course, it helps to learn how and when to delegate at times. But that’s another blog post.

Know Thyself—Know Thy Characters...

To know yourself, look at your behaviors. Observe your choices. How do you spend your time? Your choices tell you and others, who you really are inside. This goes ditto for your characters. A character—based on his or her actions—tells all to the reader. Kick a puppy and your character is condemned. Save a puppy from becoming road kill and you’ve made thousands of best friends for your character.

It’s the little things that count—those small actions that can make or break your character. A young kid visiting a grave every day after school has my vote. But a drunken teen desecrating a grave gets the thumbs down. But wait. What if that kid visiting the grave is riddled with guilt because he believes it’s his fault his mom is dead? And, what if the drunken girl was molested by the person buried there? Both choices can change the reader’s point of view rather quickly.

It’s when you pierce the armor of your character that you find the true grit. Test your character’s mettle and see where it leads. You might be surprised to find out that who you thought was a villain was—like Humpty Dumpty—so broken inside he/she couldn’t be put back together. Then again, duct tape works wonders!

Promotion, Promotion, Promotion...

Authors nowadays seem to have to wear two hats. One for the writing process and one for the business end. An on-line presence and platform is a must. One marketing firm suggests that book promotion should be done a year before the book actually hits the shelf (real and virtual). Yikes! I’ve been perusing the on-line discussions about marketing books and ebooks, and have posted as much information as I can on Facebook to help my author colleagues with how to pimp their books. Even writing a blog is precious time away from creating an author’s bread and butter.

Here are some ideas to help with the promotion process:

- Create a professional looking website or blog (or both)
- Get involved with Social Networking: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.
- Create a video trailer for your book and get it in front of your readers
- Do a blog tour
- Get reviews of your books posted on-line (preferably on your blog)
- Podcast or get a YouTube channel and share your voice

- Become a commenter and subscribe to a few blogs in your genre

Most authors dread the marketing process. It's a tough gig if you're not a natural born salesperson. Marketing gurus suggest building a media company, or join a book club with authors helping authors pimp their books. Ultimately the success of a book now falls upon the author's shoulders one hundred per cent.

The key is to coordinate your life. Know yourself enough so that you'll promote your book in the areas you're strongest in, and delegate the tasks that you're weak at.

Be Outstanding...

There's so much for an author to do nowadays. Writing, rewriting, polishing, promotion, marketing, social networking—the list goes on. So much to do and not enough time, it seems. So how can an author in today's publishing market survive? The answer is simple—be outstanding. However, the process is a little bit more complicated than that.

As a writer, you need to develop the constant urge to innovate. Understand what the best writers and exemplars in your chosen field do well and figure out why, then mix, match, and reconstruct these elements into something new and better.

Another great piece of advice is to stay diligent in the one field of writing you're trying to master. Focus on that one specific point on your map or plan, and go for it. Make it your single quest and saturate yourself in it. Become like an alchemist and dilute these desires to fill the gap.

The trick is not to compare yourself with other writers in your field who have had success. Go beyond that and work toward being so good you can't be ignored. Remember, success leaves clues. Search for them through books, manuals, audio and video programs, college or university classes, online course, seminars, and workshops. Then implement them, and rise to the top.

A Writer's BFF: The Timer...

Ready, set, write. Phone rings. You check call display. It's Mom or Dad or Uncle Conrad from Louisiana. Don't stop. Keep writing. Let the answering machine pick up or ignore the call. You can call back later. Keep writing. You've slotted out one precious hour of uninterrupted time to write by setting your timer. This is YOUR time. No one else's. Use it to your advantage.

Time is something of a luxury to writers. Time for writing. Time for marketing. Time to social network. Time for self-improvement. Time for your family. Time for yourself. It's a never ending cycle that we have to manage. So much is written about time management, you could fill dozens of shelves. Time is a multitude of multitasking, and sometimes writers feel there's not enough time in the day to get everything done. And guess what? There isn't. So what to do?

Go to the dollar store and buy a timer or use your cell phone's app. It will be one of the most important investments (and cheapest) as a writer you will make. For less than two dollars you can purchase a piece of sanity to help you organize your writing life. Set your new BFF to check emails. Fifteen minutes? Twenty? Then do the same for Facebook, Twitter, and your other social media accounts. But keep in mind which activity will help you as an author in the long run. After

all—social networking is a marketing strategy—as long as you treat it as such. Then, once you have laid the timer law down, set it for how long you want to sit and just write, with no interruptions (unless the dog really needs to pee).

And when your BFF goes off, make sure you get up and stretch. Writer’s bodies need a time limit too!

Become A Profiler...

We’ve all heard it. Zero in on your target audience. Build your author platform according to who you’re writing for. Sage advice for sure. Books without identifiable potential readers do not sell. Let me repeat that. If you don’t have target market in mind—who you gonna call? To avoid creating a manuscript no one wants, successful writers consider who will read the fruits of their labors. They know their market, and that’s who they write for.

One of the most frequent mistakes made by beginner writers—a step above the writer who does not even bother to look at the publisher’s guidelines—is to assume that EVERYONE will enjoy what they write. You have to decide early on what posse you belong with. Pick your tribe, pick your team, pick where you roll.

A great first step toward knowing your readers is learning what they already like. Read what they read. Check book reviews. Go over the bestseller lists. What needs do these books fill? Who are the main characters? What emotions are dealt with in the story? Once done, you can find the parts that appeal to your strengths as a writer and your likes as a person, to make sure that your book is not just another version of a successful series, but rather a fresher, more vibrant work.

Probably the most important rule in writing is to know your readers, but do not become so obsessed with them that they interfere with your writing what you love. Let’s face it most of us start with ideas, not readers. Awareness is the key here. Perhaps the best way to start creating a reader profile is to start with your idea, and go through these series of questions: Who will this interest? Who will this help? Who needs to know this? Who wants to know this? Once you’ve answered those questions, you can start to identify the type of reader who will benefit.

And believe me, if your readers benefit, then you’ll benefit.

The Thing About Pen Names...

Who are you? No, I really want to know. For months I’ve been hanging with a great group of authors. Many of those authors have pen names—a.k.a. PSEUDONYMS. I still don’t know one particular author’s name that I’ve come to know well and count on for support and help. I find pen names funny. Don’t get me wrong, I understand the concept of a “secret identity”. The authors want to keep their private lives private. Their pen name is their business name. Yet, on Facebook, there’s a real photo of them next to their fake name. I find that hilarious—like unmasking Batman or taking off Clark Kent’s glasses. Pen names intrigue me, so I did a little digging, and came up with these tidbits compliments of the Daily Writing Tips blog:

Authors throughout the centuries have used pen names. You’ve probably heard of the following authors:

- **George Orwell** (real name Eric Arthur Blair)

- **George Eliot** (real name Mary Ann Evans)
- **Lewis Carroll** (real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)

Authors use pen names for a wide variety of reasons. These include:

- **To remain anonymous** (especially if producing a politically or religiously sensitive work)
This is perhaps less common today, but sometimes occurs if a very personal or sexually explicit work is written.
- **To change or conceal gender**
In the 18th century, many female authors used male pen names in order to be taken seriously. George Eliot is the most famous example, though the Bronte sisters all wrote under pen names too.
This trend still continues in some genres today: for example, female fantasy or science fiction authors will often use a gender-neutral name (*Robin Hobb*) or use their initials (*J.K. Rowling*) as the genre has traditionally attracted more male readers and authors. A similar effect can be seen when male authors adopt a female pen name to write a chick lit or romance novel.
- **To write across multiple genres**
Lewis Carroll also wrote mathematical textbooks under his real name (Charles Dodgson), so adopted a pen name for his children’s novels. Authors today who write in multiple genres will sometimes use a different name for each one, to avoid confusing readers.

To recover from poor sales or reputation

If an author’s real name has attracted criticism, it may be worth considering changing to a pen name. Sometimes, the first few novels by a new author don’t sell well in bookshops, leading publishers to reject future submissions. Therefore, changing to a pen name is often recommended in these circumstances.

So there you have it: if you are trying to build up a reputation in multiple genres, using a pen name (or several pen names) is probably a good idea. Even if your real name (or current pen name) has been slammed or attracted heavy criticism, switching to a new name could be a good way to go. However, adopting a pen name means building up your reputation again from scratch—a lot of work, but it may be well worth the time and effort to do so.

A final thought: if you’re using a pen name in an attempt to remain anonymous, be aware that people are often curious when they suspect a secret—you may well be “discovered” under that mask you worked so hard to create. In some cases, this can lead to great publicity, but if your publisher or fans suspects you of trying to conceal a less-than-stellar past, it may backfire.

To be you, or not to be you? What’s your choice? I’ve decided to stick with my real name.

An Editor’s Golden Touch...

Do you want to know how to make your manuscript stronger? Polished? Close to publication? Psst...I can help with that. Correction—my former editor, Kathy Teel, can help with that. The following advice is gold to writers seasoned or new. Read on...

- The word "as" is not your friend. It is almost never your best choice. In any MS, find all occurrences of it and cut at least half. This is especially true when it occurs near a dialogue tag.
- You don't need both an action tag and a dialogue tag. For example: Jojo sneered at him, saying, "That was helpful." Those should look like this: Jojo sneered. "That was helpful." (this is where many of those words were cut)
- Dialogue tags go after the first clause in the dialogue, not at the end, unless it's a short bit of dialogue and we know exactly who's speaking. "Thanks," Monkey said. "You never know when you're going to need an antique bassoon."
- Avoid adverbs, especially around dialogue tags. "I hate you, you big fat jerk!" Merry screamed furiously. No, really, he's furious? We got that from the dialogue AND the verb (scream), you don't have to beat us with it by adding on an adverb.
- People don't usually use each others' names very much when speaking together.
- A sentence with 2 independent clauses does not have a comma: My daughter turned on Dr. Who and her friend rolled her eyes. NOT: My daughter turned on Dr. Who, and her friend rolled her eyes.
- Use "said" 95% of the time. Delete your thesaurus' entry for the word "said," and don't use replacement words for it, except in very rare absolutely necessary cases.
- Don't use dialogue tags at all unless it's otherwise unclear who's speaking. If you need to indicate who's speaking, try to use an action tag instead of a dialogue tag: Jingle jumped out of his chair. "I know that elf!"

That's it. Well, not all. There's always something when it comes to polishing and gleaning your manuscript to share with the world. The above sage advice was passed on to me because I made these common mistakes. I thought I'd share them so that any writer reading this may in turn, better their best.

The 80-20 Rule for Writers...

Apply the 80-20 rule to everything you do. Especially when it comes to your writing. What's the 80-20 rule? It's a simple formula. The basic idea is that 20 percent of the things you do will account for 80 percent of the value of your work. For optimum performance in any job, it's essential that you work on the top 20 percent of the activities that account for most of your results. This rule is also known as the Pareto Principal or Power Law.

How does this law apply to Writers? Read on...

- **Time Sucks:** You know what I'm talking about. Facebook. Twitter. YouTube. TV. Email checking. Web surfing. These activities can be gigantic time sucks. Get a timer or set an amount of time for yourself for these simple pleasures. If you do this, you'll free yourself up to dedicate time for your writing. Do it. Be ruthless.
- **Great Writing Sessions:** Some writing sessions are more productive than others. Know when is the best time for you to write, and when is not. Are you a night owl or an early bird? Know yourself well with regards to this advice. You will generate roughly 80% of your writing in the best 20% of your writing sessions. When you have a great day of writing, take notice on the factors that make it productive, and try to repeat those factors in all of your writing sessions.

- **Not-so-great Writing Sessions:** A small number of your writing sessions will be far more wasteful than the rest. What happened in these sessions? Distractions? Your special someone knocking on your office door? Pets demanding attention? Do the math and figure out the factors that prevented great writing sessions. What can you do to fix these sessions in the future?
- **Writing Quality:** Pretty much 20% of your writing will be of a high quality. That's the good stuff you should publish. The other 80% will be crap. Buck up. It happens to the best of us.
- **Know Your Audience:** What's selling for you? Your audience will vastly prefer some 20% of your writing. Know this. Embrace this, especially the enthusiastic reviews. Then create more stories like it. It should drive more success your way.
- **Creating Ideas:** You'll think up 80% of your best ideas in 20% of the time you dedicate to creative activities. Figure out what puts you in these highly creative states and try to recreate those conditions every time. Was it the music you were listening to? The tea or coffee you sipped? Perhaps it was incense you were burning. On the flipside, you'll trash 80% of your time spent generating new ideas. Maybe that time would be better spent on editing, reading or other activities.
- **Productivity:** Some days will be more productive than others. Period. Exploit those days by pushing yourself to write as many hours as you can. Make the most of it and you may complete more work in one day than in several average days.
- **Book Sales:** A cold, hard fact: 80% of book sales will come from 20% of authors. This explains why the publishing industry tosses huge amounts of money at a small number of authors while it ignores great work from everyone else. Life's not fair for those in that 80% range.
- **Success and Failure:** Some 80% of your written work will likely fail to gain an audience. However, all it takes is one major success to turn that percentage around and claim your stake in the publishing world. Grow a thick skin and keep trying.

Writing A Series...

Face it. If you've written a great book filled with equally great characters, readers will want more. Much more. And the sooner the better. Then, you start to panic. Sweat drips off your face and onto your keyboard. You're committed now. Legions of readers are waiting in the wings for your next installment.

Stop.

Don't worry.

You've got this.

The most important thing to remember in creating a series for any genre is to connect the dots, create a common thread to tie your individual stories together into a nice, shiny bow at the series end. Complicated? Not really. Read on...

First: Make sure your characters have enough problems going on both individually and together to carry through at least five books. The entire series needs to get from A to B to Z dragging your characters along (sometimes kicking and screaming) until, by the end of the series he or she or they need to come out changed. They need to have shown growth, they need to have evolved through the course of their adventures.

Second: Don't put any elements into your first story that you don't want to live with through five or more books. It's a long haul to drag unnecessary fillers such as a troublesome pet, a psychotic boyfriend or an ongoing health problem for the ride. Like they say, "Use it or lose it".

Third: Don't solve the big mysteries or resolve all their problems in the first book. Too much, too soon. The idea is to hook'em with that first book, and get your readers begging for more. Your characters should still have dreams and goals and ambitions to work toward through the length of the series. Oh yeah, and as you do answer the burning questions and resolve the terrible conflicts, make sure you replace them with additional—hopefully more serious—ones.

Fourth: Remember—it's all about building relationships between your characters. Throw obstacles their way and create the necessary tension between them to get your readers to care about them. It's all about the journey and how they work together to resolve their problems. You want readers to be as invested at the end of the series in how that relationship is working out as they were in the first book.

Fifth: Keep a series guidebook stuffed with all the vital information on your main characters and recurring side characters. The color of their hair and eyes, their brother's or sister's names, or any allergies is vital to log. Believe me readers know when something is amiss and will call you on it.

Sixth: Make sure you're writing a series for the right reason—because you love your characters enough to tell their story over a period of years to come. And hopefully, that could be a long, long time.

Author Morale...

If you look up the word *morale* in any dictionary, chances are it reads: *the degree of mental or moral confidence of a person or group*. For me, as an author, morale means much more than that. It is that needed punch in the arm authors give each other, that woo-hoo for a great review, that tweet or share or shout out to help authors with their sales, and that blog post comment to help them get on the cyber map.

So how do you go about bolstering author morale? Follow the Golden rule. Treat other authors precisely as you wish them to treat you. If they don't respond at once, keep at it, again and again and again. If there's no response, no *Esprit de Corps* among them, then it may be time to move

on and find another group of authors willing to help build your author brand and platform with you. Then, once you've established an *Esprit de Corps*, you go the extra mile.

Going the extra mile is the state of mind you must develop in order to build morale and keep the momentum going in any endeavor. And going the extra mile makes you indispensable to others. You do for them what no one else does. And if they ask what they can do for you, tell them. So next time you find yourself perusing your favorite social network—go the extra mile and give an author a boost. Share their post. Tweet their stuff. Comment, friend, follow. Trust me—you'll get it back in aces.

Creating the Perfect Author Presentation

I've been blessed with an abundance of retired teachers as neighbors on the lake where I used to live. Their brains are fresh for the picking. Yeah, I know, sounds like something out of a Zombie novel, but the fact is that teachers can be an author's best friend. I recently corralled two friends—a hubby and wife team—one is a retired elementary principal and the other taught teachers to give presentations. My mind went to mush. It needed to in order to be sculpted into the perfect author presenter. So what did I learn?

First—engage the class—draw them into your presentation. Bait the kids—in my case, upper middle grade and lower YA is my target audience. Then I hook them into thinking that it's all about THEM. Actually, it *is* all about them, they just don't need to know that! So I dusted off my metaphorical fishing rod and began to create an author presentation that would lure them in by asking these specifically designed questions:

“What's your favorite video game or game App?”

“What happens in the game?”

“Who are the characters in the game?”

“What makes this game interesting to you?”

Then once I get enough responses, I reel them in with:

“What's your favorite book?”

“What do books have in common with video games?”

Do you see what I did? Hook, line, and sinker! Engagement first, then I went into the actual presentation. From there, I ask the class:

“When a teacher gives you a writing assignment, how do you come up with ideas for your stories?”

“What's the hardest part of it?”

“What do you think about before you write your story?”

More engagement ensues before I get to share my writing process with the class, which I start by telling the class to remember that the heart of storytelling is to write what you know or like. For me, I love all things time travel, paranormal, and the mysterious, so that's where my imagination goes. My writing process is always the same for every book...

First, an idea for a story can come to me through a dream (like *The Last Timekeepers*), or something as simple as a ‘what if’ question. Asking ‘what if’ is a very powerful question for a storyteller. What if a teen with a psychic ability was sent to a small, rural tourist town? What if a group of adolescents found an ancient time portal buried in an overgrown backyard? Once I’ve got the seed idea, I’ll write notes in point form until I have the bones of the story.

Second, I create a cast of characters and build the story around them. I begin by writing out character tracking sheets (stats on my characters’ appearances, clothing, likes and dislikes, etc.) which helps keep the characters organized. I do this even when I’m writing a short story. Once I’ve accomplished this, I add the sheets to a binder that I use as a guidebook for my entire series, where each book has its own section. **BTW**—I make sure I have a character tracking sheet handy to show the class.

Third, it’s on to research, research, and more research! I find this process is the biggest investment of my time, but it’s a necessary evil. When you’re writing time travel, you’ve got to know your facts to create the fiction.

Fourth, only when I have enough facts, and I feel my characters are sufficiently fleshed out, then I begin to write the first draft. Sometimes I’m a panser (writing by the seat of my pants), sometimes a plotter (outline entire storyline or chapters)—it all depends on the tone of the book and where my muse directs me.

Then it’s on to the best part of an author presentation—the reading. I set up what has happened in my book so far before I read the selected chapter, and ask the students to imagine my story as if they were playing a movie in their head. My teacher friends suggest that the whole presentation should be no more than half an hour (unless you’ve prepared a workshop), and to make sure you have enough time to take questions from the students. When the presentation is over, I have signed trading cards and rubber wrist bands available to giveaway, and leave my book order forms with the teacher.

That’s it! A made-to-order Author Presentation created with the help of two wonderful people who have shaped the minds of both children and adults. Now that’s what I call passing the baton!

6 Steps to Bolster your Self-Esteem...

Set Big Goals! I’m not kidding. Make plans to carry out how you’re going to achieve your humongous goals. This is so important. Think about it. If you’re going on a trip, you enter all the info in your GPS or purchase a map to mark out your destination. Businesses need business plans or the bank manager will look at you sideways when you come asking for a loan. What’s the difference when it comes to planning out your life goals?

Mark down your Values and Ideals! Set your big goals based on your values and ideals. Don’t make your goals too easy to achieve, instead aim high, and the higher the better. For example, some authors I know (me included) would love their novel or novel series to be turned into a movie. Or some authors would love to sign with a traditional publishing company, while others would rather go it alone on the self-publishing route. A word of caution—know thyself—don’t set your goals so far out of reach that you give up before you even get started.

Measure your Successes! This is so important. Define what the standard is for YOU, and no one else. Understand your strengths and weaknesses, and use both to help you accomplish your goals. Form alliances with other like-minded individuals or groups and delegate when necessary.

Stop comparing yourself to others! This is so hard NOT to do. But if you continually compare your successes to other people's successes you'll find that there's always one person doing better than you. Better sales. Better book covers. Better stories. Better life. STOP IT! Your plans are not their plans. Stick to YOUR plan, and keep positive. The best thing you can do for yourself is to develop a positive mental attitude, and keep moving forward with purpose.

Recognize your Accomplishments! When someone you admire pats you on the back, don't shrug it off. Take it. Embrace it. It's good for you. People have a habit of fluffing off compliments, especially when they've earned it. So my take advice and savor that pat on the back for a job well done. Besides, it's good for us to stand in the spotlight—it makes us shine all the brighter!

Reward yourself! This is the icing on the cake. Make sure you select a reward that is consistent with the goal you have just achieved. Signed a book deal? Go out for supper to celebrate or buy those beautiful shoes you keep passing in the store window. Graduated university? Car keys please! You get the idea. When I have a book release, I usually reward myself with an expensive bottle of cognac and a cigar (and I don't smoke!). Go figure.

An Authors Comfort Zone...

This post could have also been dubbed 'Balance 101 for Authors'. When the first novel in my middle-grade/YA time travel series hit the cyber bookshelves, there was so much to do, and it felt like there wasn't enough time to do everything. I needed a time portal just to get all my marketing and promoting put in place. This included getting a website up and running, ordering promotional giveaways, setting up blog hops, writing blog posts, and joining the appropriate social media networks. The lists seemed endless, and when the date finally arrived for my book release, I was wearing my shoulders as earrings.

Needless to say, by the end of my first book blog tour, I was exhausted, spent, and bent out of shape. Even my eyelids ached.

What I learned from that whole experience is that authors need to learn to structure their writing life, or their writing will take a nose dive. We need to learn to create balance so that the task of being a writer plus a marketer plus a promoter doesn't wear us down. So, how do we do this when so much is expected of a writer nowadays?

Start with finding your comfort zone. Find your personal comfort level with promotion or marketing, do that and do no more. That's it. Do it. Or you'll get burned. If you don't heed my advice, then sure as shooting, negativity will leach into your writing. And that's the last thing a writer wants!

Need help finding your comfort zone? Go to the dollar store and buy a timer or download a timer app on your cell phone. It will be one of the most important investments (and cheapest) as a writer you will make. For less than two dollars you can purchase a piece of sanity to help you organize your writing life and keep you in your zone. Set your timer to check emails. Fifteen minutes? Twenty minutes? Then do the same for Facebook and Twitter. But keep in mind which

activity will help you as an author in the long run. Apply the 80/20 rule. Write (produce) for 80%, promote and market for only 20%. After all—social networking is a marketing strategy—as long as you treat it as such. Then, once you have laid the timer law down, set it for how long you want to sit and just write, with no interruptions (unless the dog really needs to pee).

So, stop pushing the zone. Relax. Let go. Breathe.

That doesn't mean writers shouldn't learn or try new things. By all means learn and try. Get your hands dirty if you must. But don't burst a vein in your brain doing it. Don't put so much pressure on yourself that you collapse into a quivering mass of writer goo. As writers, we must protect our work—and ourselves. It takes time to build an on-line (and off-line) marketing presence in this new publishing world. Learn this, cut yourself some slack, and prosper.

The Strange Business of Writing Fiction...

The business of writing fiction for a living is altogether strange. The writer is not like the farmer with his seeds, the teacher with her curriculum, the pianist with her Steinway or the violinist with his Stradivarius. The writer has only what's between the ears—and whatever can be coaxed to bubble up and be set down on the page. And even if the fiction writer strikes literary gold, there's still the iffy, grubby business of getting it published.

Cue the violin...

There is one writer I know of who toiled for years over what he thought was his masterpiece, only to be metaphorically kicked in the teeth over and over again. He couldn't even find a North American publisher at first, so in desperation he sent his manuscript to an agent in Britain, who managed to get his book published in a series of three volumes. Good stuff, you say? Um, no. Unfortunately, the publisher managed to somehow lose the ending of the book—the epilogue—which rather ruined the effect. Needless to say, the British critics panned the book. Even the Goodreads' trolls can't hold a candle to them.

The bad press was disastrous; the author was deeply in debt and praying that the book would earn enough money to placate the bill collectors. His prayers fell on deaf ears. But to be fair, the book he'd written was...strange. It dealt with, among many other themes, madness, murder and mass slaughter, of both men and animals. His main character was an animal—an albino, in fact, which thought and acted like a sadistic human stalker. And when the author found an American publisher willing to print a North American edition, the book ended up being a dud—mostly because of those critical British reviews.

Sadly, the author never really recovered from his failure and died an unhappy, debt-ridden failure. Hmm. It's too bad he didn't live a little longer. The author's name was Herman Melville and his book, *Moby Dick*, is now considered a classic.

Strange business, writing fiction...

Why Spying on Your Competition is a Great Way to Be Successful...

Spying is a catchy way of saying “do your research and stay tuned in.” Regardless of what you call it, it's a mandatory part of being successful. It's also a great way to build connections. There's an old saying that to be successful you have to stop obsessing about the competition. I agree with that to a certain degree, but to be unaware of what other authors in your genre are

doing is never a smart idea.

Regardless of what you write you need to be dialed into the competitive landscape. Knowing what others in your target market are doing, writing about and promoting can be key to your success as well. Not that I would ever encourage copying, but being in tune with your genre and market can be a fantastic idea generator, not to mention it gives you the ability to stay ahead of certain trends that haven't even surfaced at the consumer level yet.

First rule of spying: study your target market, the books as well as other authors in the industry. It helps you to also differentiate yourself from them in products, services, and pricing. Again, you don't want to copy, you just want to be aware. Another lesser known reason for doing this is that if you're struggling with your social media (like me)—both from the aspect of what platform to be on to what to say to drive more engagement—keeping these authors on your radar will greatly increase your marketing ideas. Living in a vacuum never made anyone successful.

Whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction, you want to know who else is writing on your topic or in your genre. Google search is a great place to start. The results will not just turn up names and book titles but also show you the best ways to interact with your reader.

Google is packed with names of authors who write about your topic or genre. As you begin to compile your list I want you to do one thing: ignore big brands because it's likely that they can do anything they want and still be successful. If you're a middle grade writer, names like Rick Riordan and Brandon Mull come to mind. These authors are big, powerful brands. You want the smaller names. The people you may not immediately recognize. Why? Because they have to try harder. If tomorrow Riordan or Mull decided to put out a book on poetry, while their fans might be surprised they would likely still buy it. But if a lesser-known author did that they'd look like they have writer-ADD. Not good.

So start putting your list together, as you do sign up for their mailing lists, and follow them on Twitter and any other social media site they use. That's what I do. Aside from the obvious reasons why you want to do this, I'm a big fan of supporting other authors in my market. Share their Facebook updates, retweet their great Twitter posts, etc.

One of the hidden gems of this research is it will also show you what social media sites to be on. If you've been struggling to figure out where your market resides, this strategy should really clear that up for you. Why? Because if you're plucking names off of the first page of Google you know one thing: whatever they are doing to show up in search, they're doing it right. Google has made so many changes to their search algorithms that you simply can't "trick" the system anymore to get onto page one. Look at their updates. What are they sharing and why? How often do they blog? Are they on LinkedIn instead of Facebook? Is there much going on for them on Pinterest or Instagram? Really spend some time with this. Not only will it help you tune into your market but it will cut your learning curve by half, if not more.

Successful authors leave clues. Are you following their bread crumbs?

3 Ways for Authors to Build Successful Relationships with Readers...

Say Thank You. I know. Floored you, didn't I? Everyone wants to hear 'thank-you'. The easiest way to say thank you is verbally—but the most powerful and memorable way is with a hand written note. So, the next time you're doing a book signing event, always thank the reader for taking the time to come out and meet you, and then include the words 'thank you' when you're signing the book they've purchased from you. It's an easy give and take, and by saying and writing *thank you*, you've created the feeling of gratitude between you and your reader—a relationship that will hopefully last a long, long time.

Have Post Cards, Trading Cards, or Book Marks ready to send out. On my website, under my FUN & FREE STUFF page, I mention that I have free signed post cards available upon request. I have been approached by readers on a few occasions for these signed freebies, which made me feel on top of the world. Depending on what genre you write, it's a good idea to have something to autograph to send to a reader whether it's a post card with your book cover and blurb on it, or book marks with a list of your books and head shot, or book cover trading cards so readers can collect them as the books come out. This is a terrific relationship builder, and a no-brainer!

Give Away the Good Stuff! Let's be honest. Who doesn't like getting something for free? I certainly do! And the best way to do this for authors is to giveaway their books. I've had many Goodreads giveaways, and they are by far one of the best ways to reach out to readers. Book blog hops and Book blog tours are an inexpensive way to build new relationships, and Rafflecopter makes the art of giving away book swag, ebooks, or paperbacks a painless endeavor. I also have a free short story available for download on my website to give away to potential readers of my books. That's the power of FREE—try before you buy!

What Authors can learn from the Great Law...

In a nutshell, here's the rule to the Great Law: If you do what other successful authors do, over and over again, nothing can stop you from eventually enjoying the same rewards that they do. But if you don't do what successful authors do, nothing can help you.

So, success is not an accident. Sadly, failure is not an accident either. You succeed, over and over, until these behaviors become a habit. Likewise, you fail if you don't do what successful authors do. In either case, nature is neutral. Nature does not take sides. Nature doesn't care. What happens to you is simply a matter of law—the law of cause and effect.

In Buddhism it is simply stated: Good deeds bring good results. Bad deeds bring bad results. Your own deeds bring your own results. Easy-peasy, right? Well, not so easy for many of us wanna-be bestsellers. But, if you want to be the kind of writer you desire to be, then start by following what your 'role model' author does, and over time and effort, you'll reach the same heights as he or she or they have. It's not a quick rich scheme. It's not even a plan for being an overnight success. It's a hard and messy and nerve wracking journey. But it's WORTH it, if that's where you're heading. I hope to see you on the road less traveled in the near future!

3 Guidelines to Giving a Great Author Presentation...

Recently, I had the privilege of speaking to a class of grade 7/8 students. Let me tell you I was blown away by how receptive those kids were! I came in with a prepared presentation, and surprisingly found the class wanting to know more and more about what it's like to be a

published author. So, I booked another session with the same class the following week with the teacher, and had the time of my life! The best part wasn't the readings—though the students wanted to know what happens next when I finished the chapter—it was the question and answer period. And believe me, sometimes kids do ask the darnedest questions!

Whether you're presenting to a small class like I did or to an auditorium full of people, here are three guidelines for your next presentation that are sure to grab the attention of your audience:

Make it Emotional. You must touch a person's heart before you reach their head. The easiest and most effective way to make an emotional connection with people is to tell stories. What I did was tell the class about my experiences on the road to publication, and the process behind writing a book. I shared the tough, rejection-filled times, and the high-five signed a contract times. I even sprinkled a smattering of gossip that my agented teen psychic mystery series is presently sitting in the hands of three traditional publishing companies. They ate that up!

Make it Novel. The human brain doesn't pay attention to boring things. Ideas that spread are unexpected, surprising, and delivered in a fresh or novel way. Kids get this. I came in with a hook. I didn't talk about my book right off the bat. I asked them about their March Break holiday, and if any of the students went on a trip. Read: I connected with them, engaged them first. After that, we talked about their favorite video games, which rolled into favorite books, which then gathered enough momentum to start my author presentation. Don't be boring. Be novel.

Make it Memorable. Make'em laugh. Make'em think. Make'em ask questions. Most of all, make'em remember you! The best ideas stand zero chance of being successful if they can't be recalled. One great technique is the rule of three. It simply means that people can only recall about three pieces of information. Don't overwhelm your listener. Give them three reasons to invest in you. I started out talking about my past life before engaging the class. They want to know about you the author, and how you ended up standing in front of them. Tease them with what's in the works for the future, then bring it home with choosing the best possible chapter to read from your book that will leave them hanging, and wanting more.

BTW—This is what the teacher had to say:

“Sharon definitely was prepared and made her presentation interesting for the class. She made a great link between the thinking of video games to the thinking of an author ie) setting, character, plot. Kids totally got that. Saw a little nerves, (had to look at her sheet) but not a routine thing for her. Glad to have her! Sharon also had time to come a second time to answer questions. Thanks!” ~Monica Park, Grade 7/8 teacher for St. Mary's School, Huntsville ON Canada

Hmm...don't think the nerve thing will ever go away. LOL!

Slow and Steady Progress: Posts from May 2014 to May 2017...

4 Tips for Overcoming Procrastination...

Have a Deadline. You knew this was coming. You've been dreading it. Deadlines seem to put the fire under your butt. For me, every time I sit down, I try to write at least a thousand words in 3-4 hours. I know that doesn't sound like much, but I go over the scenes I've written and tweak them before writing any fresh stuff. The result is a more polished first draft. I know there's loads of work to still be done, but setting this word count within a time frame helps me make my deadline to produce a book worth sharing with the world.

Remember to reward yourself. This is so important! We all need pats on the back, a fist bump or high five. Take yours. Give yourself something you've been promising yourself. It doesn't have to be big. Just put yourself in the spotlight and enjoy your 'me' time.

Refuse to rationalize or make excuses. Take the 'just do it' approach. The 'If it's meant to be, it's up to me' mentality. Go to your plan. You have a plan, right? If not, create one. Follow it, check off what you've done, delegate where needed, and remember to breathe. Like the Boy Scout motto, 'Be prepared' and you have nothing to worry about.

Accept 100% responsibility. This is a no-brainer. You and you alone are responsible for your actions (or non-actions) so don't go blaming the social media or your partner or watching the season finale of your favorite show (guilty) for taking you away from your task. Take the high road and carve out the time needed to get the job done.

3 Attributes on becoming Leader of the Pack in Authorship...

Leaders focus on their strengths. Take at least two or three areas you do well, and do them. Delegate the rest. You'll not only find that things will run more smoothly, but you'll also get a lot more done. For me, if I pump out 1000 words a day, I'm doing handstands. I usually focus on the time element and write about 3-4 hours. The rest of the day is networking, sharing what I've learned, and being a team player with other authors. I learn more from watching what successful writers are doing, and then I choose what I feel will work best for me.

Leaders are role models. Leaders are adept at that without even realizing it, so be aware and sensitive, choosing your words and behavior carefully. Remembering the Golden Rule—do unto others as you wish them to do unto you—is crucial, and will attract like-minded individuals into your life. Think about who your role model is and what it is about him or her that makes you want to walk in their shoes. The answer may surprise you!

Leaders possess integrity. Be a class act. Strive to become the kind of leader who acts with class, who becomes known as a class act, and who attracts other people with class to his or her sphere of influence. Integrity is all about the state of being complete in everything you think, say or do. The bottom line is to simply choose to live by a higher set of standards, and watch people respond enthusiastically toward you. Always remember that you're special, and you count!

9 Ways to Achieve Your Goals on the Road Less Traveled...

Achievement in any field requires effort and sacrifice. You need to act in a manner that will allow your goal to become reality. If you want to be an Olympic medalist, a bestselling author, or

a great actor it requires hard work and dedication. Every achievement in life comes with its own price tag. Here are nine guidelines for those on the journey toward achieving their dreams:

Write down what you want to achieve: Be clear and concise on what it is that you want in life. You can't commit to memory what you don't remember. Put pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard, but get your dreams and goals out of your head.

Make preparations: Know where you're going, make a plan and work your plan.

Act deliberately: Do it NOW! Taking decisive actions instill a sense of purpose and confidence.

Get others involved: No one is a self-made person. Life is teamwork. Find your team. All achievement requires the help of other people.

Expect failure: Bummer, but true. Failure is a necessary ingredient of success. There can be no success without some failure.

Keep your focus: Don't allow yourself to be distracted. Stay focused on your written goals.

Examine your journey: What's working, you keep, and what's not working, you toss out. Make sure you insert some new directions. Review your goals often, this way you'll see how far you've come!

Take a reward: Give yourself an occasional 'high five' for a job well done. Treat yourself to something special. Be refreshed and encouraged by your progress.

Be true to yourself: Never compromise your integrity and moral character. It's not worth it! Achievement is gained when we are seen as a person who can be trusted and relied upon. Be that person!

So, what are you doing in your life that will help you to achieve your goals and dreams?

6 Steps to Creating a Master Plan for your Writing Business...

I began writing my master business plan for publishing my novel series on March 9th, 2011. This was about 1½ years before I had a signed publishing contract under my belt. Since then, there have been many revisions to this plan. I decided to write down a business plan when I took the plunge to learn all I could about starting a blog to help me develop an author platform. After a few months of intense research, my blog launched May 4th, 2011. Publishing my first post was the beginning of putting my plan into action, and it was truly a lift off for me and my writing career.

My business plan and strategy spans five pages. I've broken down the plan into headings, and what I'd like to see happen. I've set short term goals (next 1-5 years) and long term goals (10 plus years). I also have an objective, which helps me keep my feet on the ground and fingers on

the keyboard. I review my plan quarterly, and revise it once a year. This helps me keep on track and weed out the things I'm doing that aren't working for me.

So how do you even go about preparing a business plan for your writing career? Every writer is different of course, and I can only give you the benefit of my experience writing MG/YA novel series. But we all have to start somewhere.

First: Begin with your objective. Why are you writing in the first place, and what do you hope to accomplish? I want to give readers an experience they'll never forget, and organize my life around what makes me happy. Figure out your objective, and get it down!

Second: List your short term goals. What do you hope to accomplish in 1, 3, 5 years? Don't go overboard, you can only handle so much. Once you figure out what these goals are break them down into headings like 'Online Presence', 'Website', 'Novels', 'Work in Progress', 'Time Management and Commitments', 'Sales Plan', 'Promotion and Marketing Strategy', and 'Financial Goals'.

Third: Now for the fun part! Under your headings list the steps you need to take to accomplish your goals. For example, under my 'Online Presence' heading I've listed in point form all the tasks I need to do to keep my author name out there in cyberspace. Here are some examples:

- I've joined HootSuite to help schedule my shares and tweets.
- Guest Blog on other author blogs within the same genre, and make sure to share this info on my social media groups.
- Continue to do interviews with other authors, especially when there's a new release.
- Approach book blog reviewers, especially a month before a new release. Offer a free copy for honest review.
- Offer my blog as a platform for other YA authors—either interviews or guest posts.

Fourth: Depending on the amount of headings and steps you have, make sure you don't pile on too much as to make this plan unmanageable. Get real with what you can handle, delegate what you can't. I had to hire a web designer. No shame in that.

Fifth: Now onto the long term goals. Remember to dream big too! Would you like your books translated into movies? How many books do you plan on writing? What about a book series? Or graphic novels? How many books are you planning on writing in your series? Create a master plan for each series too. It will be easier on you in the long run. Intellectual property like video games or apps is also important to think about and write down. After all, you never know what the future holds if you don't help it along.

Sixth: Finally, SIGN the bottom of your master business plan. This makes it real. Commit to it. Revise it when things aren't working out, or your situation has changed. Be flexible, and ask for help if necessary. Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is your writing career.

Here's a formula that will keep things in perspective and keep you on track of your writing goals: TIME + BACKLIST (8 or more books) = SUSTAINABLE AUTHOR CAREER.

6 Things I've learned when doing a Book Signing ...

I finally had my first book signing! Cue the Snoopy dance music. It was arranged through a high school friend of mine who connected with me via Facebook. This event was part of a United Way fundraiser to raise awareness for literacy and included a used book sale. Before my book signing took place, I queried a few good author friends about what their experiences were like at their signings. I got a lot of feedback and great advice. One author suggested I wear loud, colorful clothing or a clown's wig to draw attention to myself and stand out. Given the type of event I was invited to I was so HAPPY that I didn't purchase Bozo's wig. Here's what I learned:

Thing #1 – Make sure you know what type of audience will be attending your book signing. I was anticipating that there would be some children present. Um...no kids in sight. Unless you count a few rambunctious adults happy to get out of work for a while! If I'd known there'd be no kids, I would have had different treats available at my table—something more adult friendly instead of red licorice and gummy fish. I'm willing to bet Jello shots would have gone over well and netted me more book sales!

Thing #2 – Stand in front of your table, not behind it. Go meet and greet people—that's the reason you're there in the first place! Get up front and show off your wares. As I mentioned, I had candy available (sometimes that can work like a fisherman's net) and used a pair of tongs to serve passers-by. I asked them politely if they wanted a piece of candy, and they either nodded and stopped, or shook their heads, thanked me, and moved on. Now had there been kids there, I'm sure I would have been mobbed!

Thing #3 – Engage with everyone who stops by your table. Smile and talk up your books. I started off by telling potential buyers about the premise of my MG/YA time travel series and that I wrote a prequel too. I also mentioned that both books could be read out of order. Not everyone will be interested, but I did manage to sell ten books in three hours.

Thing #4 – Have freebies available for people to take with them. I have trading cards with my book cover on the front, and the blurb and my website link on the back. I also had postcards done up by my publishing company with other YA book covers printed on them. All these giveaways were autographed as a keepsake of the event. Plus, potential readers could check out my books when they felt they had more time.

Thing #5 – With table banners coming in at about \$120 and up, I decided to go another route. I printed off my two book covers (plus the cover of my free short story available on my website), made copies of them, and placed the book covers in plastic sheet protectors. Then, at the book signing I taped my book covers to the table provided for me. My covers are eye-catching, so if you have many books to choose from, print out the most vibrant covers to display. It's an inexpensive way to get your books and your name out into the public.

Thing #6 – After my book signing which ran from 11 am to 2 pm, and the oh-so-long drive home, I made sure that I emailed my hosts immediately to thank them for inviting me to attend their event. Being thankful and having a positive attitude will go far, not only with the people

who invite you to book signing events, but to potential readers. They'll feel your sincerity, whether you realize it or not.

Just Rewards...

There are many people in the world eager to take the back end rewards without contributing effort at the front end. They have the attitude of entitlement. Asking, "What can I get out of it?"

Um...not how the Universe works. Sorry to burst your bubble.

Look at it this way: A farmer earns rewards after the harvest, putting in his or her effort (a.k.a. blood, sweat, and tears) up front by preparing the ground, planting the seeds, nursing the seeds, making sure the seeds are not crowded out by other species, and are properly irrigated. With me so far? Then after harvesting the crop, the farmer collects the back end reward. Having no idea at the start what that final reward may be, farmers know only what might come from their labors if they do everything right. If the farmer messes up or Mother Nature steps in and wreaks havoc, then it makes sense that a lesser reward is taken. The farmer is only entitled to the results of the harvest.

So how does this work for writers?

Simple. All writers should ask themselves, "What can I put into my writing career to get the best possible reward?" Figure out what steps you need to take, and from there follow the farmer analogy above exchanging the word 'seeds' for 'books'. Every author writes for different reasons. To hit the bestseller list, you need to be in for the long haul. Patience is the name of the game here. To make any kind of money in this business—and like farming, writing IS a business—it takes time plus a back-list of about 8 books (or more) to produce a sustainable author career. You need a plan if you want to become a professional writer which includes some form of online presence like a website or blog (think irrigation). If you're just writing for you and having a blast self-publishing, your strategy may not be the same, but you will still earn rewards. So figure out what you need to put into your writing career/hobby and work toward those back end rewards.

What Every Author Should Know...

Feeling overwhelmed when it comes to publishing and promoting a book? Are you getting lost in the crowd? Relax. Take a breath. Release it. By focusing on these key areas, you can find the traction your book needs to rise above the crowd.

Understand the Publishing Industry: Writing a book does not guarantee you readers—believe me, I know! So before publishing, ask yourself some important questions. Who are your competitors? What do they publish? How is your genre faring in the industry right now? Knowing your market is vital to finding and connecting with readers, receiving book reviews, and getting book sales.

Book Covers are Key: Pick up a book or view a thumbnail-size cover online. What's your first impression? Is the cover unprofessional or tacky? If so, chances are you'll think the writing is sub-par. It's a smart move to invest in a professionally designed cover by someone who

understands book design and the publishing industry. You've put a lot of work into writing your book; apply the same philosophy to your book cover.

Your Best Marketing Tool is Editing: With all the competition out there, you want your book to be the best you can make it. A poorly edited book will not gain you readers, reviewers, or fans. Delegate to the professionals if you must, but don't put out a book that's destined to receive one star nods.

Get Good Advice: Honestly, there are so many reputable, free resources available to authors for every phase of their publishing journey. Blogs, social media groups, online forums, YouTube videos and more offer everything an author can imagine to get headed in the right direction. Take advantage of these resources, ask questions, learn from others, and share your insights.

Work Your Market: Cultivate readers via the social media, not by clogging the internet with spam, but by asking if they'd be interested in becoming a beta-reader for you. Many authors have successfully built a stable of pre-publication beta readers who offer their insights. Don't forget, beta readers are not editors—they help an author understand if the story works, if it's authentic.

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint: If you're going to publish a book, you have to be in it for the long haul. It takes time to learn the publishing ropes and build a following. Approach your marketing and promotion with the long-term in mind. Basic formula: Time + Backlist (8 or more books) = Sustainable Author Career.

Website 101: Build a respectable sales hub through your website. Unless you know how to convert web visitors into buyers, and know all about web conversion and SEO, you should find a professional to design your site.

Build Relationships: Saying thank you goes a long way. If you guest blog, thank your host. Are you getting book reviews and interviews? If so, be sure to thank them for taking the time to review your book or interview you because these are people you can approach for your subsequent books. Trust me, kindness and manners matter, and people DO notice.

Teamwork 101: If you're hiring people to help you publish and/or market your book, take advantage of their expertise. Look for someone with a good track record, and who understands the market, then trust their advice and let them do what you've hired them to do.

Remember, publishing is a business. In the end, it's worth the time to invest in your book, your team, and your promotion.

The Role of a Writer...

An acquaintance told me about this documentary he watched in his university course concerning the penal system in the 1950s. He's studying law enforcement and this documentary was a case study where they took students to live in a prison-like setting. Half the students were told that they were the prisoners and the other half were the guards. The take home message from this case study was that ALL the students fell into their roles and didn't veer from them. If they were

prisoners, then they were stuck in character. If guards, that's who they became. This got me thinking. Our thoughts are so powerful. If we BELIEVE we're writers, and practice this ROLE, then by God, we begin to FEEL like writers.

Sometimes it's a matter of unplugging from the hard-wiring we've had growing up. As children, we fall into roles quite easily and sometimes are stuck in these roles for the rest of our lives. An 'A' student will always be the smart one. The 'C' student won't. When I began the journey to be a published author, at first I thought only teachers or people with masters in English or in creative writing were good enough to be authors. It was a huge obstacle to overcome for me mentally, but overcome I did. I broke the mold that I was stuck in for years.

Once I retrained my mind, I developed a positive mental attitude, and I found that I started to feel free from the limitations I grew up with. It really didn't matter if I didn't possess an English degree or MFA, I knew I could learn to become a published author by sheer determination, perseverance, patience, and practice. I had the time to invest in following my heart, and I did.

I made a commitment. I scheduled my time. And I asked for support from my family or friends when I needed it. Remember the only thing holding you back from your writing aspirations is YOU. Break out of the role that's keeping you from your dreams. You'll be happier and healthier in the long run.

Books: Products or Experiences...

As an author I had to ask myself this question: do we sell a product (book) or an experience (memory)? I recently read a marketing post where there was a study conducted in which people were asked if they would prefer to purchase a product (car, couch, etc.) or an experience (holiday, concert, etc.), and guess what most said? Yup. You guessed it. An experience.

So this got me to thinking that authors have it pretty good. Yes, we sell a product whether it's a book or an ebook or an audio-book or all three. We still have to market and promote these 'products' in order for our consumers (readers) to find them. But once our books are in the hands of readers, magic happens and they're whisked away into another place, and another time.

Authors create an experience for each of our readers. And that's the payoff. Experiences tend to have a lasting effect on people. Sure, buy a car and you've got that new car smell for about a year. But I bet you remember going to your first concert, don't you? Or maybe your first trip to Disneyland? I certainly do.

If you purchase a book, true you may lose it, but I guarantee you that story will stay with you for years to come if the tale hits an emotional cord. And isn't that why authors are in this vocation to begin with?

Building Book Sales using the Reverse Engineering Method...

Remember that kid who decided to take apart a toy just to see how it worked? And then, surprise...that same kid couldn't figure out how to put it back together again. Authors can sure learn something from that one kid. We can learn how to use reverse engineering to figure out why readers buy our books. Think about it. Kids take something (computer, radio controlled car, Barbie dolls) apart to see how it works, get to the guts of what makes that thing go, run, fly,

burp. So why shouldn't authors be able to take apart the sale that lured readers to buy the book in the first place?

The first question you should ask yourself is: Why did you purchase *insert name of book*? Was it because it was your friend's book? Perhaps a suggestion? Or a book you learned about through a review? Was it an emotional purchase? A New York Times Bestseller? Or was the book part of Oprah's book club? I want you to chase down the sale and figure out what made you buy that certain book. Got it? Good.

Now once you do this kind of *reverse engineering* you can build a profile for the sale. You get to see how a sale is built. You get to know how the book market works. That's when you can develop a marketing strategy for your own books. Get it? Great.

A lot of times you'll find the answer is word of mouth via the social media, or a friend suggested the book (or wrote it), or they passed by a bookstore window and the cover caught their eye. Even Oprah has the golden touch. Dig deep, and find the reason for that sale.

While doing my own reverse engineering, I suddenly saw this quote from Bill Gates in my Twitter feed: "*You're most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning.*" That's when it hit me. Book reviews. Not the one-star reviews you get from trolls, but those reviews that seem sincere, yet only give you a 3 star. Those are gold. Use these kinds of reviews to fine tune your writing. Listen, really listen to what the reader/reviewer is conveying to you, and apply their advice in your next book *if* it rings true with you. I know you can't please everyone, but you can certainly make changes in your writing that will help boost your book sales and reach new readers.

Virtual Book Tours 101...

In anticipation for the upcoming re-releases of both my MG/YA time travel books, I've decided to hire a book promotion specialist to help with the process of setting up and running a book blog tour. I've learned in the past that for me, it's easier to delegate rather than take on certain tasks. However, if you love the thought of being in the driver's seat and setting up your own book blog tour, then this post is for you.

Below is a 15 point checklist for planning your virtual book blog tour. It's not rocket science, but it will give an author an idea of the different steps that are needed to pull off a successful book blog tour.

- Make sure you plan at least 2-3 months in advance.
- Determine your goals for your book tour. Remember you're bringing awareness to your book(s) so make sure you're clear on what you want to get across to potential readers.
- What type of tour will you be running? Book blast? New release?
- Determine the length of your tour and the tour dates.
- Are you going to run a contest during your book tour?
- Decide whether or not to offer giveaways or discounts. I usually use Rafflecopter to run a giveaway. It's easy and picks the winner at the end of the tour.
- Make a list of prospective hosts and research them. Hint: pull from your well of blogger author friends who write in the same genre as you do. You'll be able to pay them back when they do a book tour.
- Write an invitation and send to your top prospects.
- Correspond with hosts and send confirmations.

- Set-up a schedule of tour stops.
- Post schedule on your blog or website.
- Plan your promotional strategy, and include your tour hosts. Some may want to do a review. Others may want to share an excerpt. Do up a top ten list or dream cast based on your book. There are plenty of ideas to draw from!
- Write articles/posts and send to your hosts at least ten days in advance. Don't forget any images you may want to include.
- Set-up a daily routine to follow during your book tour.
- Finally—this is a must—make sure you COMMENT on each of your host's blog. Check in periodically to see if anyone has commented, and reply to them. This is a common courtesy, and your hosts are going out of their way to help support you and your book.

6 Sales Points for Authors...

There are a lot of authors out there today competing for readers' attention—readers that you've worked so hard to obtain. Some do a very good job, make a lot of money, and stick around, building satisfying publishing careers that last for decades. Other authors try to wing it and burn out. What's the difference between a successful author and a wannabe author who just dawdles on the borders of success? Owning a great website? Having a damn good marketing plan? Creating a social media plan for each book release? Good luck? Whatever the answer, often the key to a successful career in the publishing field can be attributed to one or all of these time-tested sales points:

If it doesn't work, fix it. Let's face it—some sales strategies work better than others. The trick is to reassess what you've been doing. If you're not producing the sales you'd like to see for a certain book, then chances are you need to correct and fine-tune your methods. For some authors this may mean retooling their blurb or tagline or change the cover. For others, it could be giving their website or blog a fresh new look.

Listen and learn. A number of things factor into book sales. One of the most important is your target audience—who you are writing for. Ask yourself, how are you fulfilling your readers' needs? What do you need to do to continually hook their attention? For starters, you have to be willing to walk that extra mile by getting to know and understand your readers. You do this through social networks (Facebook, Twitter), workshops, book signings, school and library visits, book clubs, and online communities such as Goodreads or LibraryThing.

Show enthusiasm. Enthusiasm builds bridges. Panic tears them down. One thing an author has going for them is their unique voice. You use it in your books, so use it to sell them. Readers know when an author resonates with them. Be invested enough in yourself, as an author, to give your readers a fantastic story they'll never want to end. Then write another one.

Sell yourself, on yourself. The power of positive thinking works wonders. Motivation builders such as podcasts or self-help books can help reinforce the super salesperson in you. Be specific with your goals and rewards, such as if you send out ten review requests in a day, book a pedicure or lunch with a friend. Write notes reminding yourself that you are a 'Bestselling author' and 'You can do it', then leave them around your desk. After all, seeing is believing.

Create a sales plan to suit each book. Every book you write is one of a kind. Sales tactics for one book may not work for the second book. That's when you get creative and take chances. Giveaways are always a fan favorite. Experiment with each book until you get a sales formula that works for you. Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes help, so if you can afford it, hire a publicist or a marketing consultant. The bigger the investment, the bigger the payoff.

You give, you receive. “What goes around, comes around”. This is a hard adage for a lot of authors to relate to, but it is nevertheless a vitally important point. And it's a no-brainer. I tend to share a lot of useful information that could help my author peeps with their sales or marketing strategies. This comes naturally to me. Pass along opportunity when you can. It's a wise investment—one that any author will never regret making.

3 Hats an Author Needs to Wear to Succeed...

Honestly, if I knew that it would take over fifteen years to become a published author I would have thought long and hard about whether I should go down that road less traveled. But I did. And the truth is that you can't buy this experience. You digest it. You absorb it. You bleed it.

What I've learned in those fifteen plus years is worth more to me than any university degree I could ever earn. The skill of actually writing and crafting a book is such a process that it takes years to glean, and once completed no one can take that feeling of accomplishment away from you. NO. ONE. I've also learned that a writer must wear three different hats if he or she wants to succeed in this crazy writing business.

Hat #1: Asks what I am skilled at doing? I imagine this hat like a hard hat you'd wear at a construction site. This is information that you and you alone must discern. Use your natural abilities or skills that will serve you in your writing business. Good at blogging? Do it! Great at sharing information to help others achieve their dreams as well as your own dreams? Go for it! We can't be good at everything. We just can't! Understanding where your skills lie will help you tremendously when you seek publication or if you decide to go it alone.

Hat #2: Asks what do I enjoy doing? Yay! This is a fun hat! I imagine this hat looks like a jester's cap with bells. Do what you love, love what you do. These are the tasks that you find rewarding. Plan a novel. Plan a whole book series. Write that first draft. Only you know what makes your heart beat faster and brings you joy, and once you figure that out then as cliché as this sounds, the world is your oyster.

Hat #3: Asks what can I uniquely contribute? This is a more serious hat for me—a fedora perhaps—business-like and serious. Do you want to write something of value to share with the world? Or just with family and friends? Will your books be useful (read: sell) in the marketplace? Do you have a business plan mapped out and ready to go to take your readers on fantastic journeys? In the end, it's all up to you to determine what you can give, and how you want to go about doing it.

In dreams, hats represent the attitudes you show others most, your mental outlook, your various jobs, talents, personalities, and aspects of yourself. Hats reveal how you cover up or display what you really think or how you protect your ideas. What kind of hats do you think you would wear to succeed in the publishing business? Now, where did I put my jester's cap...

Blurb Blinging 101...

Blurbs. Stop groaning. You know you need one to help promote and market your book. And if you do up a blurb correctly, have an eye-catching cover, and wrote a great story, then you've done your job. The blurb is one of the most important marketing tools in getting your book ready for publication. In fact, you've already got a version of your blurb done—the synopsis in your query letter is essentially the same thing as a blurb. Here again, though, there are some significant differences. With a query letter, you're relating the entire plot. With a blurb, you want to entice the reader—to get them engaged with your story so they can come along as you unravel the plot for them. So here again—while the forms look very similar, their purpose is quite different.

Here's a surefire method to develop a quick, cohesive blurb. **THINK THREE PARAGRAPHS.**

In the **FIRST** paragraph, introduce your main character. Now in the **SECOND** paragraph, introduce your secondary character— a BFF, love interest or antagonist—and the conflict. Remember, the conflict is what drives your plot.

Then in the **THIRD** paragraph, you bring it all together. This is where you pose a question to the reader—maybe not a straight out **QUESTION** but a rhetorical one. You want to give the reader a sense of urgency regarding the plot—what will happen if the characters' attempt to resolve the plot fails. In other words, what the stakes are.

The blurb in its entirety tells its own little story—and that's what keeps people buying and reading this book. You want to set up the protagonist, the conflict, the obstacles to resolving that conflict and to give the reader a sense of the risks involved in failure. What you've done is to create a microcosm—a tiny example of what your book—the macrocosm—is.

Writing a successful blurb is a test of any writer's skills. It's darn hard to filter down sixty thousand words into five hundred or less. But this is a skill a successful writer must learn to do. Throughout your career, whether this is your lone book or the first of hundreds, whether you stay in independent publishing or whether you move on to traditional publishing, you **MUST LEARN** to write effective taglines and blurbs that work. That sell. Your. Book.

When Characters Must Die...

My hubby and I have an ongoing joke. When a character is killed off or leaves a TV show, we call it a *contract dispute*. The exit of some of my favorite TV characters got me thinking. When is it the right time to kill or remove a character from an ongoing book series? Is it when the character stops meeting the readers' needs and expectations? Do the characters become boring? Stop growing? Refuse to change? Perhaps. I guess the best sounding board would be the readers. Listening to them on the social media or reading the reviews they post. Are they sick of Character X? Does Character Y make them want to vomit? Or do readers even relate to Character Z? Mind you, I'm not sure killing a character off would have the same effect in sales as it does for TV ratings, but you never know until you try. Bahaha...

However, if you kill the wrong character you'll have blood on your hands and angry readers. Case in point—when Arthur Conan Doyle killed Sherlock Holmes by sending him over a waterfall with his arch enemy Professor Moriarty in tow, it wasn't pretty. I mean for Sir Arthur,

and the readers demanded satisfaction. Seriously? What was he thinking? Note to self: don't piss your fans off!

In my time travel series, *The Last Timekeepers*, I've seriously thought about replacing certain characters to freshen up the series as it progresses, although nothing is written in stone yet. Readers are continually looking for new and improved characters to keep them invested in any series. That's the reason why TV shows keep introducing new characters into a series. Even J.K. Rowling added new characters (and killed off a bunch) throughout her Harry Potter series.

So my question is: when must a character die or leave? I'm guessing there are so many answers to that question, but the reason I'd off one of my characters is when there's no more room for character development or growth. That's what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attempted to do when he killed off Sherlock Holmes—he tied up all the loose ends and made sure Holmes lived a full life. Unfortunately, Doyle underestimated his readers, even though he wanted to cash out and move on to writing other books. And to this day, Sherlock Holmes has survived his creator, and duped death. Now that's one loved character!

6 Tips on how Authors can be Artful at an Art Market...

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending my first Art Market with my new publisher. I looked forward with anticipation to the throngs of new readers I would meet there. I had my bucket of candy good to go. I had signed postcards and trading cards lined up across our table. I had my Sharpie® marker at my side, ready to sign the copious amount of books I'd sell. And I had Justine, my trusty publisher by my side to introduce me to the world. Um. Yeah. Cue the crickets. What I found out was Art Markets and Craft Shows are not for the faint of heart and may not be the best venue for authors. However, NEVER underestimate the power of connecting with future readers, and getting the word out about your books and products.

Below are six simple tips I picked up from 'working it' on the blacktop during those two days at the local Art Market:

1. Usually potential customers (a.k.a. readers) are lured to tables when they see books. That's a no-brainer. Make sure you have an eye-catching banner running across the length of your table and that your books are strategically placed in stands (you can purchase these at any dollar store) and positioned together in the same genres.
2. Engage readers immediately and ask them what genre they like to read. Then, go for the sweet spot and ask them the names of their favorite authors. Since my publisher had an array of books and authors of different genres splashed across the table, we had a better chance at filling the readers' literary needs. For example, some liked fantasy, others were avid young adult fans, so we steered them toward the appropriate section. **FYI**—two of the most popular genres were mysteries and historical fiction. I think Justine made a note of that!
3. Next, ask the reader what book covers hook them. You'd really be surprised at their answers. A group of gray-haired women loved to read blood and guts (still laughing about that), yet my cover for *Legend of the Timekeepers*—the prequel to my time travel series—scared the hell out of one of them! They ended up buying one of the darkest books we had on stock. *Head desk*

4. If children or teens are in tow, move to the front of the table and go for the candy. They're already staring at the jar, so with their parent's permission, offer them something that they love. Even adults love candy, so go with your gut and offer them a sweet temptation.
5. The elements of nature can be a loving force or a force to be reckoned with. Be prepared for anything. My publisher brought a drop sheet in case it rained, but when the wind kicked up we had to hold onto the tent for dear life! Thankfully a kind vendor across from our table loaned us a couple of cinder blocks to batten down the hatches!
6. Finally, never ignore anyone, and always end conversations on a positive note whether they purchase a book or not. Hand them a brochure on your products or a signed postcard along with a smile. You never know. They might just buy your book at later date!

Dos and Don'ts for Reading at an Author Event...

The beginning of September proved to be a busy start for myself and five other authors who celebrated our summer of new releases. When all was said and done, the night was quite profitable for all the authors. Throughout the evening, I noticed a few glitches during the readings, plus listened to some good advice from the people in attendance. So I compiled a list of dos and don'ts from what I gleaned during our author reading event...

Do speak up. I know this is a no-brainer. The venue we were reading in had poor acoustics, so that made it even harder for a soft spoken person. Perhaps having a microphone or Karaoke machine on hand would eliminate this problem in the future for similar venues.

Do introduce yourself. Tell your readers (or future readers) a little about your past and how you got into writing. Keep it short and simple and interesting.

Do thank everyone for coming. Again, a no-brainer. Practice the attitude of gratitude.

Do pick an excerpt that will hook your audience. I did not, according to a few comments, and now thinking about it, I must agree. *Head desk* Make your reading exciting, not boring. I did manage to change my voice and mannerisms for certain characters, so I get a thumbs up for my performance.

Don't forget to shut off your cell phone, or turn off the ringer. Um...should be a no-brainer, but obviously a couple of people did not do this. One person actually answered his phone DURING A READING. Not cool. Please be respectful to the authors and audience.

Don't forget to acknowledge your publisher. After all, you wouldn't be there without them!

Don't forget to mingle and mix with the audience. You want them coming back to your next book reading event!

Hit your Readers in the Heart...

In order for an author to be successful, he or she must have a successful author brand. Your brand is your name. It's how people connect you with you or think about when your name is

mentioned. For example, Stephen King = horror, Rick Riordan = young adult myths and legends, JRR Tolkien = epic fantasy, Kelly Armstrong = paranormal romance, and Diana Gabaldon = time travel romance. I could go on, but you get the picture. Each name evokes a genre or a series, and each brand is high concept.

So how do you develop your author brand (name) into a household word that conjures creepy clowns or teen demigods or hobbits or sexy werewolves or time traveling standing stones and men in kilts? You need to hit your readers in the heart. Create a positive emotional experience so that they'll become loyal readers and word of mouth heralds for each book you publish.

This strategy is the basis of social media. You connect with others because of what they say, pictures they post, or the experiences they share. Somehow, an emotional cord is struck, and you want to reach out to people and give them your support or a kind word or thank them for making you laugh your ass off for posting a cute dog or kitten video. Emotion connects us all, makes us human. And depending what you share or post, if people like what they read or see or hear, they begin to trust you. If you're an author who writes books with animals as main characters, you can bet you'll grab the interest of animal lovers all over the world.

One way to help figure out your 'brand' is to create a tagline for yourself, just as you would for a book. I did a lot of soul searching on this and decided that I wanted to conjure feelings of nostalgia with each book I write—give my books that 'good old days' spin. Who doesn't like happy memories of their childhood? So I came up with: *Escape to the Past and have a Blast*. Simple and direct. I want my readers to escape from the mundane and be drawn into a familiar world where they'll have a pleasurable and exciting experience. At least that's my hope!

When you find out what makes your audience tick, you've hit their sweet spot. You give them more of what they want. They need it. They crave it. Write it for them. Make them feel *through* your words. It's what an author does. It's what we crave.

3 Ways for Authors to Connect at Comic Cons...

Ever been to a Comic Con? I attended and worked at my first one recently, and I have to say it's not what I expected. Diehard fans swim through the aisles, wearing costumes of their favorite super hero or from their favorite video game or movie. And it's scary. These fans are true-blue, focused, and know what they're looking for when they come to spend their hard-earned money. While I was working the aisle with my publisher, I made some mental notes and came up with three ideal ways that may help authors connect better when showing their wares at a Comic Con.

Make your name (brand) known. This is part of your author brand, so have a banner along the table or a poster looming behind you that explains who you are, what you're selling, and what you're all about. Signage is so important at Comic Cons and any event you attend as an author. So show'em what you got!

Work the floor. I bought a costume specifically for this! I dressed up as Robin Hood (one of the characters in Book #1 of The Last Timekeepers series) and handed out chocolate gold coins or wrapped red licorice to people passing by. When working the floor at any Comic Con or event, you should use the three 'Ses'. Stand. Smile. Small talk. Be approachable (hence the costume) and for goodness sake, create a connection so that people will remember you!

Give away promotional material. This is a no-brainer. People LOVE freebies! That’s why I like giving candy away at author events. Stock up on postcards with your book covers on the front and info about the book and you on the back. Don’t forget to sign them either! Bookmarks are also a favorite among giveaways for authors, and my publisher had plenty on hand that offered 15% off if you buy directly from their website. What a deal! Be creative with your giveaways, you never know when you’ve made a fan for life!

One last thing. It helps if you’re an active member of your graphic novel/comic community. Your networking is solid and your foot is already in the door. People buy from authors they know and trust. The fan base is the meat and potatoes of a Comic Con. Create your own fan base by connecting with people at events such as Comic Cons, continuing to build your author brand, and being authentic in the way you treat and help others. Trust me, this goes a long way with people, and may just get you noticed!

Writers and Coping with Stress...

No one in life gets a free pass on stress. It’s like our shadow, following us around, sometimes huge, sometimes small, and thankfully sometimes not there at all. We writers face stress all the time in the form of looming deadlines, writer’s block, research, misbehaving characters, editing and revising, finding time to write, not enough money flowing to the author, and so on. We get so caught up in life (which is truly the messy bits), that we forget to take a breath, and let go.

Stress is our body’s alarm system telling us that there are new changes and demands in our environment. Stress is also a natural response when there are big changes in our lives. Unfortunately, stress can drain our body and mind, making it difficult to focus on other things—like finishing writing that freaking book! In the long run, all we can do is our best.

So how might you do your best?

Increase your activity – especially in pleasurable activities and tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities. Sometimes it’s just a matter of getting out of your seat to stretch, or taking a walk that will release the cork.

Goalsetting – Break long-term goals down into short-term and attainable goals. I know life can get (and does get) in the way of your writing goals. Moving. Publisher closes. Death in family. Parent in the hospital. It’s taken me almost two years to complete the next installment of my time travel series. Go with the flow or you’ll be swept away. You need goals to keep you from going under. Plus, they will keep you sane while the hurricane is blowing you around in different directions. Remember: This too shall pass.

Mental Imagery – Imagine yourself successfully coping with a situation, and do a mental rehearsal by doing the task successfully. This works great for athletes, so give it a try!

Being assertive – Stick up for yourself while being respectful of others. Block off time for you to write or your goals will never be reached. Use “I” statements rather than “you” statements. This sets up your boundaries for others to respect.

Deep breathing 101 – Relaxed breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing, so when things get crazy, take a mental step back and try this:

- Close your eyes, sit comfortably, scan your body for tension

- Breathe from your belly, not chest
- Your stomach should move out as you breathe in, and in as you breathe out
- Breathe out any anxiety, tension, or pain
- Count from 1 to 8 slowly as you breathe:
- One – breathe in
- Two – breathe out
- Three – breathe in
- Four – breathe out
- Five – breathe in
- Six – breathe out
- Seven – breathe in
- Eight – breathe out

Feel better? Works for me always! I even do this breathing exercise in the car. So in the future, if life gets too messy and those words aren't making it to the page, then remember to take a deep breath and relax, and *know* you're going to do your best to get you through this stressful time in your life.

Engineering Exciting Excerpts...

The task of engineering exciting excerpts is actually easy for a writer. You've already written it. Now you just have to find it. An excerpt is typically 500 words, and for a short story about 200-250 words. The advice I have is general—pick an excerpt from the first third of your book. Told you it was easy! Although very rarely does that mean that you need to copy and paste the first five hundred words of your story and call it a day. For a short story? Yes—that's exactly what you do. But not a novel.

Why, you ask? Well, that's inherent in the differences between long and short fiction. A successful short story begins with a strong hook. In order to sell a short story, you have to pull the reader in from the very first sentence. With a novel, the creation of the story comes along with a more deliberate pace. With a novel, you want to select a scene that sets up the story and above all makes the reader want to read MORE.

In other words—a cliff hanger.

Say you're writing a young adult romance novel. A good choice for any YA romance novel excerpt is a scene between the heroine and the hero. A first meeting, perhaps. A confrontation. The moment when the heroine first realizes that there's something different about this guy.

Say you're writing a middle grade fantasy novel. Pick a scene that jump starts the action. A fight. The moment when the hero realizes that he or she has a purpose to fulfill. The moment when everything changes.

Once you've decided on a scene, the real skill comes into play. You need to pick the moment of that scene where the reader absolutely has to know what happens next. And if the reader wants to know, what does he or she have to do? Buy the book. Which is, of course, the point.

So that's the kind of scene you want to choose for your excerpt. And here's another little hint, too—if you DON'T have a moment like this in your book, then you have some work to do. Every good story should have a moment like this—several in fact. That's how you want to end a

chapter, a POV section. That's a real cliffhanger—the excerpt, the paragraph, the SENTENCE that forces the reader to turn the page. The moment the reader thinks, "Well, one more chapter won't hurt. I'll just read a little while longer." That moment is the holy grail for every story in existence. This is how writers should approach every excerpt they choose.

And one last thing—wait to pick your excerpt until an editor has gone through it with you and cleaned it up. The absolute worst thing that can happen here is for spelling and grammar errors to make it through to publication. Your excerpt, like your blurb is part of your sales strategy. You can't sell a car if the engine doesn't work, right? Well, technique—grammar, spelling, structure—is the writer's engine. It doesn't matter how great your story is, it's not going to run unless those techniques are there and sharp.

Shredding what doesn't Work for a Writer...

I've gotten into this purging habit. Around the middle of February, I clear out my filing cabinet, and shred any papers that are useless or I don't need anymore. Bills, sales receipts, accounting documents, and manuscripts that should have never seen the light of day. This got me to thinking how I could apply shredding to my writing career. What am I doing that isn't working anymore? What book marketing strategies need to be purged? What type of book promotions are a waste of time? Is blogging worth the effort?

Does any of these questions sound familiar?

March is the month I revise my business and life plan. So I thought, what better way to shred the old from my life (things that aren't working), keep what's working, and start up with new ideas. I love it when I've gone through the filing cabinet, cleaned out the files, then either shred any bills older than 2 years, or file the rest in a plastic container for a period of one year. The exception being our taxes, which I keep for the recommended seven years. The filing cabinet seems so much lighter after this task is done. And for some reason, so do I.

Sitting down to revise my business and life plan this year, I went through the document page by page, striking what I've accomplished under the WORKS IN PROGRESS subtitle (and feeling good about it), to eliminating what I thought were time wasters (blog hops, certain social media groups, dropping Tumblr) under AUTHOR BRAND AND PLATFORM. Blogging is time consuming, but I believe my name (BRAND) is getting enough weekly Google Alerts and views to continue creating posts. When it came to the subtitle PROMOTION AND MARKETING STRATEGY I added a few new ideas, and kept the old tried and true. Book Blog Tours (only for new releases) seem to work well for me. I've recently joined Pinterest, so I'll see how this works out in the future for me, while creating boards based on my characters, historical settings, and personal interests. Wink.

I'm also very happy with the freedom I have with my new publishers, who have promised to keep a yearly slot open for my ongoing time travel series *The Last Timekeepers*. This year, I will have Book #2: *The Last Timekeepers and the Dark Secret* out sometime in the fall. I've already started gathering research for Book #3, and am looking forward to delving into a fresh story. I know the key is to focus on what I enjoy, and build for the long term. That's what a lot of writers forget—they're building a career, and careers take time.

So shred what's not working for you, and lighten up your load. Remember: slowly but surely wins the race.

Sharon Ledwith's 10 Rules of Writing...

Do what's best for you. Find your rhythm and write what you love. You are your own #1 fan! Your best bet is to follow your heart.

Exercise first. You're on your ass hours at a time. I exercise in the morning so my body is recharged and ready. Don't forget to get up and stretch between writing periods. You need to get out of your head at some point, so you might as well do something healthy.

Keep post notes and note pads around your desk (or in your purse) to brain storm or get that next idea down before you lose it! If you're a techno-geek, get an app that suits you and your needs best.

Go with the flow. Be prepared for family emergencies or major life transitions. Life certainly gets in the way at times. It's best to be flexible and understand that some things are more important. Your story will wait for you.

Keep learning, and keep growing. This industry changes in a blink of the eye. If I didn't learn how to blog, get on social media, and start my author platform, I would have been left behind.

Enjoy the journey. No matter what stage of the publishing game you're in, make sure you reevaluate your steps to know how far you've come. Pat yourself on the back, and remember to celebrate any milestones too!

Tweak your writing plan at least once a year. You do have a plan, right?. Get rid of what's not working, and refine what is working for YOU.

Blog at least once a week. This keeps your name (author brand) out there in cyber-space, and provides fresh content for your followers to read. It's also great writing practice, and is a form of self-discipline.

Find your balance. Be unshakable. The publishing industry can squash your dreams. Don't compare yourself to other authors. That can be soul crushing. Remember everyone is on their own path. JK Rowling is on hers, Stephen King is on his. Stick to yours, and blaze your trail.

This is non-negotiable for me: HELP OTHERS ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS. Whether you share or tweet their posts, do a cover reveal on your blog, or review their book, you'll find that when you give, you get. Plus, it will make you feel good inside and out!

The writing business can be messy and hard at times. Even authors need a set of rules to keep them on the straight and narrow (or off the beaten path).

Resonating with your Readers...

If you write it, readers will come. Or so you thought. But what if your readers don't come? Worse yet, what if they can't find you in an ocean of authors begging and bartering for attention? Writing is hard work. The business of writing is even harder work. So how DO you RESONATE with your READERS? I think the key here is that you have to RESONATE with YOURSELF first. Think the Law of Attraction: like attracts like, and you'll know what I mean. You attract what you want (or don't want) through your thoughts and feelings to create your life circumstances.

Let's start by defining the word *resonate*:

Resonate: to be resonant; resound. To produce resonance.

Hmmm...let's look up *resonant* and *resonance*:

Resonant: resounding or reechoing. Increasing the intensity of sounds by sympathetic vibration. Full of, characterized by, or intensified by resonance.

Okay, then. Sit tight. I narrowed down the next definition to reflect this post specifically for writers:

Resonance: an underlying or pervasive quality or a particular type, especially in a work of art or literature.

And just for fun, here's what my thesaurus says about the verb **resonate**: echo, reverberate, resound, ring, vibrate, boom, have far-reaching effects, impact, have deep consequences.

Now we're getting somewhere! In order for authors to build a readership, they have to LOVE what they write. They have to be passionate about what they're writing. Don't do it for the money, that affair won't last. You'll run out of steam before you even get out of the station. Remember author Amanda Hocking? She was deemed an overnight success with her paranormal romance books. Um. Yeah. No such thing as an overnight success. That girl had a tough day job, then came home, did what she loved to do (wrote and published books), and sold over a million copies of her ebooks. Amanda is considered one of the exemplars of self-publishing success in the digital age. Her books also resonated with readers because of the genre made popular by Stephenie Meyer's Twilight explosion. Boom!

Here's the BIG question: Who are you writing for? If you answered 'ME', that's a step in the right direction to create resonance with readers. Write what you want to read, what makes your heart sing and vibrate (resonate) to a different beat. There's an old saying, 'Do what you love and the money will come.' It certainly came for Amanda Hocking. And it will come for you too. As long as you permeate the publishing world with books written from your heart.

Author 2.0: How Writers Are Supposed To Succeed In This New Publishing Paradigm...

Honestly, my head hurts from thinking about what authors have to do now-a-days in this new publishing paradigm. I've written posts before about this topic and all the tasks writers are up against. Write, rinse, repeat has become an author's slogan. The world wide web is crammed full of blogs, publishing services, publicists, and anything a writer needs to get their books into the hands of readers. This whole industry has changed so much in the last ten years, and I'll wager it will keep changing. What won't change are those who try to pass themselves off as 'authors' and continue to write bad books thinking they'll get rich quick, and those who are in for the long haul, invest in themselves and write good, even great books. The proof is truly in the pages.

Apparently there are five ways authors can succeed in publishing. Bet you're biting at the bit to know what they are, right? Okay, I'll share, but just to let you know, I found this same information on numerous blog posts I've read (when I should be writing my next book). That said, I added my own two cents based on my own experiences as an author. I believe most of this advice is just common sense, but you be the judge:

Have a strong, savvy social media presence. When I first burst into the publishing world with my debut book, *The Last Timekeepers and the Arch of Atlantis*, I had a year under my belt with my blog, and a Facebook account. That's it. My then publisher (now defunct) gave their authors a basic idea on what we had to do to promote and market our books, but it truly felt like once my book was published, I was put out to sea in a life raft with one paddle and a megaphone. Since then, I've gotten more of a presence (Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn), and made so many social and business connections for which I'm eternally grateful. It takes a village to raise an author!

The Power is in the Pricing (\$2 to \$3.99). Readers love to fill their ereaders up, and giving them a great price for hours of entertainment or education is your best bet to building your audience. This is a no-brainer. Although, if a reader wants to spend \$10 or more on an ebook by his or her favorite author, then they don't break a sweat when hitting the buy button.

Pre-Orders. Again, you're creating buzz with this sales tactic. Add a cover reveal, a giveaway, or raving book reviews into the mix, and you may just have a bestseller on your hands.

Write a Series. I'm on that gravy train! Or at least I've left the station. So far I've got two young adult book series on the go with *The Last Timekeepers* time travel adventures and *Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls* teen psychic mysteries. Guess I'm in for the long haul for sure!

Hook Readers with a Free Installment. Part of me has a problem with this. Authors work hard, damn hard, at their craft. Somehow, a free book seems to cheapen an author's work (but that's for another blog post). I do get the idea, and technically FREE is a good thing. Hell, I like free stuff. Who doesn't? I even have a free short story on my website for readers to download. Still, many authors give away their first book for free in the hopes that readers will like it enough to invest in more books written by the same author. Again, a great strategy, but I somehow think it's akin to selling a piece of your soul. That's just my opinion.

So there you have it. Five ways to try to find success as Author 2.0. Hate it or love it, publishing has become a game of misdirection and manipulation—the trick is to find a Houdini instead of a charlatan.

Tackling Titillating Taglines...

You need to hit readers hard, blindsides them with an awesome tagline in order to grab their attention. I cannot overestimate the importance of this. Your tagline, blurb, and excerpt are the most important sales tools you have for your book. Choose them wisely.

Every author wants people to read their book, right? Well, they aren't going to find your book unless you put it out there and MAKE them want to read it. Throwing away your tagline and blurb is just like taking your book and throwing it off a bridge in the hopes that someone will fish it out of the ocean, find it, and think it's great. So let's go over developing a tagline that will make readers care enough to pick up your book and purchase it.

A tagline is—or should be—one of the simplest things to create. A tagline is—plain and simple—a one sentence summation of the theme of your book. Something quick and catchy. If you're moving on through publishing by attending conferences and conventions, a tagline is similar to what is called an elevator pitch. What you want to do is to catch a reader's—or an agent's or an editor's—attention with a one-sentence description.

Remember, a PITCH and a TAGLINE are two different things. A PITCH is to get someone to buy your book with the intent to publish it. A TAGLINE is to get someone anonymous, in a bookstore or online, to buy your book to READ it. So your tagline should be about your BOOK.

Here's the tagline for the first book in my middle grade/young adult time travel series, *The Last Timekeepers and the Arch of Atlantis*:

“Children are the keys to our future. And now, children are the only hope for our past.”

Is it the best tagline ever? Nope, probably not. But it tells the reader exactly what the theme of the book is. Look at the points it covers—what it tells you about the book. What does that tagline cover?

Children. Keys. Future. Hope. Past.

That's the purpose of a tagline and how to make it work for you. Therefore—homework lesson number one. Sit down and READ your book. You may think you know what it's about, but if you're a writer like me—you don't. READ IT. As you read, jot down notes to yourself. One. Word. Notes. Hit the high points of your book. What themes, what high points do you think sell your book? No—even simpler: what tags or key words are IN your book? Because those are what will sell your book. Readers don't always know what they're looking for in something to read. Your tagline will give them clues.

A few examples of great taglines:

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman ~ It takes a graveyard to raise a child.

The Maze Runner by James Dashner ~ Remember. Survive. Run.

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson ~ Two lives are bridged – and nothing will be the same.

Do you see what all of these taglines have in common? They titillated enough readers to become bestsellers.

So that's your first job after your book is written. To sit down and read your book, and to pull a tagline from it. And this is where the elevator pitch and the tagline come together. In an elevator pitch, you've got maybe thirty seconds to gain the interest of an editor or an agent—just as long as it takes the elevator to get to their floor. With a reader, you have your book cover and one sentence—just one sentence—to convince them to click through and read more. You cannot afford to throw that chance away. So a tagline that's trite or vague or boring cannot be an option.

Planning your Story...

Here's the deal. As a writer, I used to struggle with the question of whether I'm a plotter or a pantsner (write by the seat of my pants) when it comes to writing a novel. Truth be told, I'm a little of both, but after much contemplation, I find I veer toward being a plotter. Wait... correction, after writing six complete novels, I've *evolved* and discovered the outlining process that works best for me—a STORYBOARD.

Yup. Those large, cork bulletin boards Disney used to use when creating an animated feature movie. I'm a visual person, so I like to look at the board filled with a printed plan, mark it up with highlight pens, and chart my way through my novel. I'm also not shy on using plenty of Post-it® notes when an idea or concept pops into my mind that will make a scene or chapter better and stronger.

I find using a storyboard to plan a novel is less stressful, and I get a cleaner first draft at the end. Since I'm writing two book series (The Last Timekeepers and Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls), it helps to get all my ducks in a row by knowing where all my characters are heading, and who is the point-of-view character in each book. I do this by using CHARACTER TRACKING SHEETS which logs everything about a character like the color of his or her hair and eyes to what clothes they're wearing to their talents, wants, and signatures. I place these sheets in a series binder for safe keeping and a quick reference. Like I said, I love visuals! Now before I get right into plotting out my novel chapter by chapter, there's a little thing called RESEARCH that I must do to give my story a sense of integrity and value. That's when all those 'what ifs' start to bubble in my imagination, and solidify the story.

Once most of the research is done, I begin by creating an outline document with the NAME of the NOVEL, then state the WORKING PITCH (that's the 'what ifs' and 'what's at stake'), PREMISE, and SETTING in that order. Next, I write out my MAIN CHARACTERS (beginning with who's telling the story), the age of each character in the book (they get older as the series unfolds), and maybe an update about them. Then, I write out a list of the GUEST CHARACTERS and include their roles in the story. I follow this information with a bullet list of PROBLEMS, COMPLICATIONS, OBSTACLES, and CHALLENGES the point-of-view character must face that will bring his or her out of their comfort zone, make them suffer, learn a valuable lesson in the process, and grow from the experience.

And then comes the PLOT, broken down into CHAPTERS, with a blurb on what occurs in each chapter. It's like a road map for me, following the twists and turns, peaks and valleys, that takes my point-of-view character on a scary-wonderful ride through words. I number and name each chapter which helps me keep on track of the story structure and build scenes. Of course nothing is written in stone, that's why I use those Post-it® notes, and scribble down the sides of my outline if the MUSE inside directs me toward a better direction and destination.

This way of planning a novel is a fairly new process for me, but I've found that it keeps me organized and disciplined as a writer. Many authors I know use other methods to outline their novels, so I urge you to experiment with different ways of plotting to help you build a better book.

An Author's Worst Enemy: Self-doubt...

Last year, I got my gumption up and decided to get a tattoo to not only celebrate a milestone birthday, but also rid myself of any self-doubt I was carrying inside me about being a writer. The tattoo I choose is quite popular—the Superman shield—but it means more to me than what the man of steel portrays in the DC brand comic books. It means breaking free from all those blocks and obstacles I struggled with to first, learn to write a book, and second, to keep submitting until

I was finally published. This was a fifteen-year journey to publication, where as you can imagine, self-doubt continued to creep in like weeds strangling flowers in a beautiful garden.

To find the strength within and smash through those obstacles and (writers) blocks, an author needs to develop perseverance. Once you understand that ‘Rome wasn’t built in a day’, then you allow for the Universe to work its magic to help you make your dreams and desires come true. This ‘staying power’ comes from a place deep inside you, and makes sure that you never give up, if you’re willing to keep following your heart. It’s no wonder Superman’s shield is emblazoned on the chest area, directly over his heart. Personally for me, the ‘S’ in the shield stands for Sharon, not Superman, and represents my stamp of self-approval. Go figure. Though, I have researched that the ‘S’ is also the Kryptonian symbol for hope, which is an added bonus for a bright, promising outlook.

Let’s face it. Life is full of challenges and obstacles. Those are the things that makes us stronger, better, faster. That’s what our characters face every time we writers drag them through the muds of hell. Then, like us, our characters evolve and grow. Writing is a tough gig, but so rewarding when you write those final two words ‘The End’. It’s a badge of honor, and feels wonderful and uplifting, like you’ve reached the pinnacle of super hero status.

I’ve found that the hardest part of being a writer is the stick-to-itiveness. Going through the basic training that every super hero has to go through. You learn. You fail. You pick yourself up, maybe fail again, and again. But you get back up until you’ve mastered one level, and then move on to the next one. You excel, you celebrate every word you jot down in your magnum opus. Giving up is not an option when you have something to say. The trick is to make your readers feel what you feel.

Full Steam Ahead: Posts from May 2017 to January 2021...

Coping with the Emotional Challenges of Being a Writer...

As an author, the number one emotional challenge I find is being overwhelmed. These days, writers must wear so many hats. Indie authors more so. If you’re lucky to score a contract with a publisher like I did, a lot of the work such as your book cover design, editing, formatting, and some marketing and promoting like book blog tours are taken care of for you. When you’re under contract with a publisher you’re a part of a team, and are expected to participate fully. But if you decide to go with self-publishing you either learn the ropes and wear all the hats, or delegate and hire cover artists, editors, formatters, and book promotion or marketing specialists. And believe me it’s not cheap.

We live in a new time of publishing where the rules are not quite yet defined, and anything goes. So writers need to figure out what they can handle, and what they can’t. I hired a web designer. I’ve even hired a book promotion specialist company to help with my social media presence as an author. Writers are a tough breed. You must realize that you can’t handle everything. Or this business will break you. It’s humbling to understand you need to rely on others, and it will create a sense of peace. Balance what you can, and dole out the rest.

Writing is such a solitary profession. Humans need human contact. Period. Face it, we weren't born to live a life of solitude. Like attracts like, and writers are no exception. I connected with other writers through courses, social media, my publishers, writing groups—I could go on, but you get the gist—because of our common love of books and writing. Writers know what other writers go through. They feel each other's pain, know what it's like to be rejected, and invest a lot of time, energy, and money into a profession that may or may not pay off in the long run.

Supporting other writers, and helping them out when the going gets tough, has helped me tremendously when I've felt down in the dumps and overwhelmed. And those awesome writers do the same for me. These emotional challenges happen to the best of us. So why not hang with like-minded souls, who can give you a hug—virtually or physically?

Writers Living Right...

Writers are mostly on their butts doing what they love to do, but our bodies were made to move. I used to write first thing in the morning to get my word count, but as the day blossomed, exercise went on the back burner. So I kick-start my day by either doing free weights, abdominal exercises, and push-ups, or gliding on my elliptical for 20 minutes. Once the exercise routine is done in the morning, I feel recharged and ready to start the rest of the day writing, planning, marketing, or promoting my books. I still try to get up and stretch every hour, and to make sure I do this, I purchased a small trampoline and keep it in my writing office. Believe me, it gets all those author parts moving and shaking in all the right places!

Another healthy lifestyle tip for writers is to take breaks throughout the day. The truth is—we all need to periodically step away. We skip breaks in the name of “getting one more page written,” but when we don't break from our work, our productivity suffers. We lose focus. We start making small mistakes and even forget things altogether. Our bodies have a natural ebb-and-flow response to stress that allows us to work hard and then relax and recover. The problem comes when we chronically trigger those responses. We become all flow and no ebb, and you can only cheat the system so long before it becomes counterproductive. Set a timer if you must, or download an app that will remind you to pull away from your task, but for the sake of your health, give yourself a break!

Want another reason to rest and recharge your writing muscles? I find if I overuse my computer mouse—whether writing a novel, editing, blogging, or engaging in social media—my wrist starts to throb. Then I know it's time to put on a wrist brace, and rest my hand as much as possible. Or I switch up and use my other hand. Eye strain happens more when I'm revising and proofing. Sometimes I use an eye patch to give my sore eye a rest. The one thing writers don't want to screw around with is the health of their eyes. So take frequent breaks when proofing or editing. Your eyes will thank you. The key for me as a writer is that I've learned to listen to my body. I stop if it hurts. I rest. Stretch if I need to release the kinks. It's pretty much all common sense!

One more thing. Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! Your body needs lubrication. Water massages your major organs, flushes toxins from your body, increases energy and relieves fatigue. And if that wasn't enough to get you periodically up out of your seat to go grab a glass or bottle of water,

drinking enough water can also help with weight loss. A bonus for any writer who doesn't want to drag around that secretarial spread behind them. So, drink to your health, and bottoms up!

Making it as a Writer in the Publishing World...

Self-doubt can cripple a writer. Even kill his or her dream of becoming a successful published author. Continual rejection (from both publishers and agents) can get under your skin and rip it to shreds until there's nothing left, nothing to bleed out. Believe me, I've been in those trenches and it wasn't pretty. So how did I pull myself out of this darkness? I. Just. Kept. Going. I felt I'd put too much time and energy into writing and planning books, I thought I might as well keep going, as I love doing this too much to quit. Plus, I'm truly a stubborn broad.

From the time I decided to learn how to write a book (1995) until I could finally call myself a published author (2012), there were a lot of those 'dark times'. Still, I stuck with my dream of becoming published. I learned the craft of writing, joined writing groups, took courses, honed my skills, and wrote six books. Translation: I got my hands dirty. I practiced, persevered, and learned the art of patience. Those three key things pulled me out of my funk, and kept me going.

Another way I coped was to learn to develop a positive mental attitude through reading books and blogs geared toward positivity and success principles. This alone will take you far in anything you want to accomplish in your lifetime.

When you buy a house, you make an investment. When you go to school to learn a profession or trade, you invest in yourself. Writers can better their best only by investing the time and energy into their craft by going to conferences, writing workshops, taking writing courses, reading books on writing, and practice, practice, practice. I've got a lot of years under my belt just with practicing and learning, and have two book series to show for it. Was it easy? No. But I knew I was being true to myself by following my heart, and investing in myself.

I truly believe I was called to be a writer. At least the small voice inside my head said so. Like those blood donor ads that say 'it's in you to give', so it was for me by following the path as a writer and give the world the stories bubbling in my imagination. Yes, I'd love to be a bestselling author. Yes, I want to make money doing what I love. Most writers want that. I know I have something to say so I stay on the path, stick to my plan, and smile with each step I take.

4 Successful Ways to Promote your Novel...

It's not all about book reviews when promoting your novel these days. Yes, book reviews are valuable and securing them should be on any author's book promotion to-do list. However, your book deserves more widespread, long-term, and on-going exposure than it can garner through reviews alone. And every writer knows that getting your novel to be talked about month after month is no easy feat. So what can authors do to get their books into the hands of their readers?

You need to generate the ongoing chatter your book deserves by seeing the publicity and promotion value in your fiction. There's no question that promoting fiction is harder than promoting nonfiction—but because of that, it's also more rewarding. Here are four ways to help you promote and manifest sales:

Find the nonfiction gems in your novel to use in creating newsworthy material for relevant media outlets. For example, in *The Last Timekeepers and the Arch of Atlantis*, I set the novel in Medieval Nottingham around the time Robin Hood was suspected to have lived. I found interesting tidbits that could be used for an opportunity to be featured on travel blogs. If you're writing your novel now, make sure you work in some nonfiction gems you can capitalize on later.

Use your content to identify promotion allies. In *Lost and Found, Book One of Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls*, I wrote about the local animal shelter in the fictional town of Fairy Falls, and the tough task of continual fundraising to keep the shelter from closing. I contacted shelters and rescues in my area with the hopes of working with them, and bringing awareness to the ongoing struggle of lost and abandoned pets. Don't just send them a note that says, "I've written a book your members will love." Meet with them, or send a copy of the book with a letter outlining promotional possibilities and what's in it for them.

Engage first. Focus on one or two social media networking sites. My two preferences are Facebook and Twitter, but there's a whole slew out there to choose from these days. Make sure you master the most effective and appropriate ways to use social media to promote your book before spreading yourself too thin on several sites. Sometimes less is more.

Make the connection. Help readers connect with you by blogging (you do have a blog, right?) about your writing process and experiences. Get excerpts up on your website (you definitely should invest in your own cyber real estate) and read portions from your books via podcasts or YouTube videos so potential readers can get a feel for your writing and decide if the story is worth their investment. Give readers enough online (website, blog, YouTube videos, podcasts, free downloads) to convince them they'd like your book enough to hit the buy button.

My #authorlife Experiment: Making the Unfamiliar, Familiar...

I'm sure you've heard that getting out of your comfort zone can be a painful, often scary experience, but the end results usually end in transformation and growth. Right? Well, I recently watched a YouTube video about trying to share an image of yourself on your social media accounts for 30 days straight, and then seeing what happens after the month has ended. The thought of doing that made me squirm inside. You see, I'm an introvert at heart, and like to keep my personal life...well, personal. Sharing an image of myself—with all my wrinkles and flaws—a day for an entire month seemed downright weird and just a little egotistical. Besides, what kind of image would I post, and what would I talk about? Then, I approached my publisher with this idea, and she suggested that I share an image of a day in the life of an author, and call it #authorlife. My eyes widened, and I resonated with her suggestion immediately.

So, choosing the month of September for my #authorlife experiment, I decided to take a shot and put myself out there for 30 days sharing what it's like to live in my 'author' shoes. And yes, it was scary, and yes it was painful, but I managed to complete this task, not missing a day, but one—September 10th, the day after we put our 12-year-old Labrador down. I dedicated that #authorlife spot to my yellow fellow, who went peacefully in my arms the day before. I was a mess and grieving for weeks after that, but plodded on, taking selfies and sharing what I was up

to each day. It was awkward and hard, but I managed to make the unfamiliar, familiar, and I found it got easier to find things to share and talk about.

Using my Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts, I shared book marketing ideas, books I'm reading, a dedication to my dear author friend, Lorri Carpenter who passed away the same week as my dog, my morning exercise regime, took you grocery shopping, for a walk, paying bills, researching for my work-in-progress, flashed shameless plugs, and the list went on. After all, life is full of mundane routines too. And a writer's life is no exception. I'm sure Stephen King still takes out the trash or puts away the dishes. Makes us human, and more relatable.

One of the most cherished #authorlife images was taken on Labor Day with my dog just before I took him for his walk. It was the last photo I have of him before he passed on a week later. You can't get moments like that back. Ever. So I would like to think that this little experiment was a success. Personally and professionally. I managed to get way out of my comfort zone, build up my social media platforms, engaged with people who seemed quite interested in my journey, had fun, got creative, and shared a piece of myself that I would have never shared before. Did this result in more book sales? Not sure, but I really don't care. This was about growing as a person, getting more self-confident, and seeing how much I changed throughout the month. Especially when I wasn't wearing any makeup! LOL! How brave was that? Wink.

Would I do it again? Not for 30 days straight, but I've decided to keep posting my #authorlife images at least once or twice a week. It's an investment in my self-worth, and hopefully will help other writers by giving them ideas or letting them know that they're not alone in this crazy publishing business. Plus, you put yourself out there, and connect with people on a different level where you're not pandering to them, but giving them a smile or helping hand instead. And that's what I call success in any vocation.

Writers: Are you a Tortoise or a Hare...

We writers tend to fall into two categories. You're either a tortoise or a hare. What do I mean by that? I guess what I'm trying to get across is that some writers write fast, and can crank out thousands of words in one sitting, while other writers are slower, and write at their own speed and pace to get their books done—even if it takes them years. I'm not talking about whether you're a plotter or a pantsier (writing by the seat of your pants). I'm talking about whether a writer is prone to being a 'hare' (fast writer) or a 'tortoise' (slow writer). So, let's get real, and be honest. Which one are you? A hare or a tortoise?

I must admit, I'm definitely a proud tortoise. Though I mentally (and emotionally) kick myself at times for being such a slow writer. A good day of writing (3-4 hours) consists of over five hundred words—a great day is over a thousand. I know a lot of my slow-downs happen when I need to do some research in the middle of a scene. It's been suggested to me by the powers that be (my publisher) that I should just highlight the area where the research is needed, and continue on with my writing. Of course, boss-woman *is* correct, and what she advises makes a heck of a lot of sense. But...um, no. I want, correction need to KNOW what happens in that scene, and if I'm using the proper terms and things found in the time period I'm writing about to move the

story forward. For me, finding the historically correct information is vital to finishing the scene. Sigh. I must be built that way.

At times, I envy all you hares out there with your nimble fingers flying across the keyboard, and your devil-may-care attitudes. You're the writers who get more than one book written in a year. I truly applaud you for that accomplishment. You're also the writers who probably have a messy, mucky first draft, and need to go through many drafts to get your final story. Me? I usually have a clean first draft that's closer to publication than the hare's speedy attempt at a novel. My mantra in this crazy writing gig is, 'Slow and steady progress assures success'. So I plod along like the tortoise, much like the one in Aesop's fable, who ends up crossing the finish line to win the race against the confident, cocky hare. Perseverance, after all, will keep us writers going and going—like that pink Energizer Bunny featured on those battery commercials. Or is it really a hare? Wink.

Authors: Are You Ready to Rock the Holiday Events...

During the holiday season in December, I had the pleasure of attending a Christmas Market with my publisher. This event was held on the first three Wednesdays of December starting at 4 pm and ending by 8 pm. I looked forward with anticipation to the throngs of new readers and holiday shoppers I would meet there. I had my bowl of candy good to go, and my trusty Santa hat washed and ready. I had my marker and giveaways at my disposal in preparation to hand out, or sign the copious amount of books I'd sell. And I had my amazing publisher by my side to help pimp our reading wares. Now, I've found that Art Markets and Craft Shows are not for the faint of heart and may not be the best venue for authors. However, the three Wednesdays we worked during this holiday event proved to be worth it in the long run. I'd also like to remind all you hard-working authors that if you don't get a sale at a particular show, fair or event, NEVER underestimate the power of connecting with future readers, and getting the word out about your books.

Below are 5 simple tips I've picked up from 'working it' at those Holiday Markets:

1. Usually potential customers (a.k.a. readers) are lured to tables when they see books. That's a no-brainer. Make sure you have an eye-catching banner running across the length of your table and that your books are strategically placed on shelves or in stands (you can purchase these at any dollar store) and positioned together in the same genres.
2. Engage readers immediately and ask them what genre they like to read. Then, go for the sweet spot and ask them the names of their favorite authors. Since my publisher had an array of books and authors of different genres splashed across the table, we had a better chance at filling the readers' literary needs. For example, some liked fantasy, others were avid young adult fans, so we steered them toward the appropriate section.
3. Have freebies on hand. Book marks, rack cards printed with your book covers and blurbs, and business cards are the staples. Last year, my publisher created mini sampler booklets of the first chapter of some of their books available to purchase, and stuffed them into Christmas stockings to hang off the table. Kids love taking these goodies home, and it gave the parents a chance to check out the book.

4. If children or teens are in tow, move to the front of the table and go for the candy. They're already staring at bowl, so why not offer something that they love! Even adults love candy, so go with your gut and offer them a sweet temptation. NOTE: Make sure you ask the parent's permission first.

5. Never ignore anyone, and always end conversations on a positive note whether they purchase a book or not. Hand them a business card, book mark, catalogue of your books, or a signed rack card if available, along with a smile. You never know. They might just buy your book after the holidays!

An Author's Legacy...

Besides being 'Luke Skywalker Day'—May the fourth be with you—it also marks the ninth anniversary of this blog: *Sharon Ledwith: I came. I saw. I wrote*. I started blogging—not really knowing anything other than reading *Blogging for Dummies*—on May 4th, 2011, before I even had a publishing contract. If you build it, they will come, right? Funnily enough, the contract came four months after I began blogging. It truly feels like a blur now, and I've learned so much since that inaugural date. That said, when I was trying to come up with a post to mark my blogversary (is that a word?), I found an article in our local paper that piqued my interest enough to pass on the wisdom I gleaned from it.

The headline read 'MAGICAL MEMORIES', with the subhead, 'Disney letter among artifacts for Capitol Theatre's 100th anniversary'. The article goes on to explain that, in 1938 Walt Disney himself sent a letter to the Windsor Daily Star, thanking it for helping promote a screening of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at the Capitol. The article goes on to quote, "Disney is a thing unto itself. That fact that the person who was the head of the Disney empire took time to write a letter to the Windsor Star—Windsor Daily Star at that time—to thank them for their assistance in promoting a Disney film, it's amazing. Incredible, actually."

I couldn't agree more.

The letter goes on to mention the newspaper's "splendid cooperation" in spreading the word about the movie's run at the Capitol. Disney continues to write, "May I take this opportunity to thank your staff and especially your artists for their many kindnesses?" Wow, just wow! The letter was ended with Disney's handwritten signature in large, swooping letters.

Can you imagine that kind of correspondence happening in this day and age? Imagine say, trying to get through to George Lucas if you were showing a Star Wars film. Um, no. Wouldn't happen. And neither would George sit down and write a personal letter, and send it to you. It just goes to show you Disney's considerate gesture speaks to a very different time in our world. Kind of makes me sad, in a way.

Then, I thought about what kind of legacy authors can leave behind in this ever-changing, post COVID 19 world. How a small gesture like Disney's would make a difference in a reader's life? Kindness and manners still matter in my mind, and never go out of style. There's a handful of authors I know who do go out of their way to thank others who help promote them, give them a shout out on social media, or read their books and leave reviews. Most good business owners

show gratitude to their customers in one way or another. Why not authors? After all, we are the owners of our stories, and publish them out into the world (or cyber-world) to sell to prospective readers.

Which leads me to the point of this post. A small kindness or act goes a long way with people. Sending a thank you card or donating your book to a school you did an author visit at, or adding value to a reader's day by answering their email or social media message. It's a little boost that will go a long way in a person's heart, and probably make their day brighter. So take a page out of Walt Disney's business book, and take time to connect with and grow your audience. It's a great investment in your future author-self. Never forget, the world needs YOU!

A Behind the Scenes Look at Creating a Book Series...

Did you ever wonder what goes through an author's mind when trying to create a book series? Doesn't matter the genre, there's still so much planning around building a series' premise, creating the main (and secondary) characters, doing all the needed research, plotting the stories, and finally sitting down to write the books. Actually, it's exhausting just thinking about all those steps, but truly worth it if you want to leave behind a piece of your soul to the world.

I thought I'd give you a peek at the process of writing a series, so I decided to compile a list of questions I was asked by different interviewers about my teen psychic mystery series, *Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls*. I follow up each answer with a '**behind the scenes tip**' to drive home the messages I want to convey, and to help writers get a sense of what I went through to develop this particular book series.

What inspired you to write *Lost and Found*?

During my year-long stint as an animal care attendant, I learned so much about the procedures and daily routines of working in an animal shelter. Then, one day, I found myself wondering what the animals would say if they could talk? How they would act and sound? What did they really think of humans? So, chasing down the animal voices frolicking in my head, I decided to write their story. The result is, *Lost and Found*, the first book in my teen psychic mystery series, *Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls*.

All the shelter animals in *Lost and Found* are based on an animal I cared for in some capacity at the shelter. Now, trying to come up with each animal's unique voice wasn't that hard for me, since I went by the personality of the cat or dog. I observed certain quirks, how each animal behaved, what were they afraid of, what they liked, and so on. What I found was that every animal (even kittens born in the same litter) was different. Just. Like. People.

When I was ready to sit down and write their story, I compiled a list of shelter animals that readers would emotionally relate to and connect with. Many came to me as a surprise, while others were firmly planted in my imagination from the very beginning.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Write what you know. Yes, you've heard that old song before, but I knew the ins-and-outs of how an animal shelter operated, so I applied that knowledge when it came time to plot the story and create the setting.

On *Blackflies and Blueberries*, how did you decide to bring blueberries and blackflies into the story?

We lived in Ontario's cottage country for almost twelve years, and each May we had to deal with those pesky blackflies. In fact, I owe the experience of living in a small, tourist town environment to creating the Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls teen psychic mystery series. The second book in the series, *Blackflies and Blueberries*, came about while I volunteered to be a tutor at the local literacy council. I've always be drawn to the occult, paranormal, and supernatural, so I got the idea of a teen psychometrist (the psychic ability to discover facts about an event or person by touching inanimate objects associated with them) who could 'read' objects, but was essentially illiterate and couldn't read most words.

I wanted the book to span through a summer season in the fictional tourist town of Fairy Falls, so I started with blackfly season (May) and ended with blueberry season (August). The title fit in so well with the theme of blackflies pollinating blueberry bushes to yield fruit, so I went with my intuition. Plus, I absolutely love blueberries!

Behind the Scenes Tip: Setting is important. Build your series world from the ground up using what you've experienced in real life. Use your interests and opportunities as background information for your characters. Being a volunteer for a charity or cause can give your story great bones and authenticity.

What was the biggest mental/writing challenge you faced along the way while writing *Lost and Found*?

I'll give you three:

First—could I pull this book off, and make the animals sound authentic?

Second—did I do enough research on what it was like to be an animal communicator (the psychic ability featured in this book) to make my main character (Meagan Walsh) believable to readers? Then, I realized that after doing the needed research on animal behaviors and finding enough facts on animal communication, I was well on my way to writing what my heart so desperately wanted me to share with the world. I learned that animals are so empathic. They feel our energy. And sometimes, they know us better than ourselves.

Third—to create the small, tourist town of Fairy Falls—the setting that would glue this entire teen psychic mystery series together. I didn't have to stretch my imagination that hard since I wrote what I knew based on where I was living at the time—in the heart of cottage country. So I took in the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, emotions, and feelings of this beautiful place, and added the challenges and obstacles of what it would be like for an uprooted teenager possessing a psychic ability to adjust to the day-to-day living in Fairy Falls.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Self-doubt will always creep in from time-to-time. It's normal. Feel it, let it go, then imagine what it would be like to walk in other people's shoes. You'll create some awesome characters if you can do that.

Aunt Gertie is such a colorful character in *Blackflies and Blueberries*. Will we see more of her in Fairy Falls?

Definitely! She's such a unique character, and is loosely-based on my mother-in-law. Since each book is set in Fairy Falls, but with a different cast of characters dealing with a psychic ability, I write in cameos for the characters of my previous book. After all, it takes many characters to create the essence and environment of a small, tourist town like Fairy Falls, so I want readers to expect the unexpected every time they pick up one of my books.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Become an observer of people. Aunt Gertie's character was based on my deceased mother-in-law (with a few quirks added), and if you do it right, readers will want to continue seeing them throughout the series.

How did writing *Lost and Found* change you as a person?

Realizing that we (including animals) are all here to serve in some capacity. Whether that's through our experiences, creative expressions, careers, professions, being parents or caregivers, we've all got something to contribute to this world while we're alive. It doesn't matter if it's in a big or small way, we all matter, we all have voices, and we need to be brave enough to use them.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Writing and publishing a book is a humbling and exhaustive experience. Every book you write will change you in some manner. That's the beauty of creating something from nothing, of becoming a butterfly from a caterpillar.

Diana MacGregor's little sister Nancy is a perfect sidekick in *Blackflies and Blueberries*. Her addition was truly brilliant. Were you as curious as Nancy when you were a child?

Yes. I always wondered what went on beneath the surface. Once a guidance counsellor suggested that a career as a detective might be a good fit. Can you imagine? LOL! I guess I was always an intuitive child, but didn't realize this as an adult. It took me a long time to uncover this ability again, and thankfully I found it when I started writing in my mid-thirties.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Never underestimate the power of your intuition. It will lead you to create amazing characters that readers will relate to.

What have you found has been the most effective marketing technique for *Lost and Found* so far?

I reached out to a couple of animal rescue organizations at a few of their events when *Lost and Found* came out, and gave a portion of my book sales to help with the care and needs of the dogs and cats they had rescued. In a way, I felt by writing this book, I was being a 'voice' for the underdogs/cats in shelters everywhere, bringing awareness to the plight of animal shelters, and the continual need for fundraising, adoption, and spay and neuter programs.

I've also managed to get my book into a pet food store chain, and attended a literary event to promote *Lost and Found*, while sharing the spotlight with the manager of our local Humane

Society. Of course, never underestimate the power of social media, and all those animal lovers out there!

Behind the Scenes Tip: There's always a way you can promote your book series through your community, especially at fund raisers or charities that your characters are invested in. Go deep, and pull out those promotional golden nuggets.

What advice would you give other writers now that you've been through this process?

Trust that inner voice of yours that's telling you to write her/his/their/your story. Write what's important to you, what you want to say, in whatever genre you're compelled to write in. Don't follow trends, they change. Know that you'll be in it for the long haul if you want to make it as career writer, so don't give up on your dreams. And the most important: please, please, please don't compare yourself to other writers. They're on their own journey, and you're on yours, so put your blinders on and follow *your* heart.

Behind the Scenes Tip: Be authentic in every story you pen, and remember that patience is truly a virtue. You'll get there, word by word.

Is there one thing you'd like readers to know about you?

I *love* to uplift people, even if I just get a smile out of a person. I use humor in all my books as a way of connection, and to hopefully make a reader's day better and brighter. I guess it's the way I can serve authentically and just be myself!

Behind the Scenes Tip: Always add value to others. After all, we're built to serve.

Looking Back On My Personal Crazy Journey to Publication...

The journey to publication wasn't easy for me. In fact, it took me a great deal of time and effort to get to where I am now. So, let's go back in time to 1995 when I got bitten by the writing bug during a *Planning Your Novel* workshop I attended for fun at the local college. One of the exercises I volunteered for still sticks in my mind. The teacher handed me three pennies, and I had to throw them into a waste basket one at a time. I managed to get all three coins in, shooting at different angles and distances. My teacher, Tom Arnett—a NYT bestselling author—was surprised at my luck because the norm was usually two pennies in. He explained that getting all the pennies in would suggest your (writing) goals would be too easy because the person threw them from a close distance. On the flipside, one penny in (throwing too far away) suggested having unrealistic expectations/goals about a career in writing.

You could say that this penny exercise set the bar for me, and gave me some hope in a field I knew absolutely nothing about. I ended up taking Tom's eight week night course, *Starting your Novel*, and from there the writing games began...

Trying to get published looked something like this:

- Write a book (I choose a shapeshifter paranormal romance) which took about 2 years, including research and learning the basics. Lots of sweat equity!
- Attended a workshop where I met an agent, and handed her a query and outline, which eventually got her interest. This went back and forth for a time (about four years) until the agent admitted that my book wasn't developing the way she wanted it to go, so we decided to go our separate ways. Sigh.
- Around 1998, I had a dream where I saw seven arches, and there were seven people (five kids, two adults) with crystals in their hands, walking up to these Mayan-like arches. It definitely had an *Indiana Jones* feel to it. At that time, I was trying to get my paranormal romance published, and had no intention of writing for the young adult genre. But this idea kept growing in my mind, and wouldn't leave, like some mystical force pushing me from behind. So, I thought I'd challenge myself to write a time travel series based on that dream, calling it 'The Timeliners', and years later 'The Last Timekeepers'.
- Had some luck with *The Last Timekeepers* when an agency and publishers showed interest. But their interest was short-lived. Rejection, rejection, and more rejection followed.
- In 2003, we sold our graphic trade business and house, packed up, and moved to our renovated cottage in a popular northern tourist area located in Ontario. I decided to become a tutor for the local Literacy Council in the winter of 2004. While living pretty much off the grid (we had dial up internet), I started a teen psychic mystery series entitled, *Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls*, pulling from my experiences living in the wilds of cottage country.
- I enrolled in a two year correspondence course geared toward writing for children and teens to beef up my writing chops.
- Then, I decided to try my hand as a participant in the 2007 Muskoka Novel Marathon, where previously I had helped with the organizational aspects of this event. The idea is to write a novella or novel in three days, and the winner gets a chance at publication. During the course of the marathon, our dog died suddenly and I left for the day, only to come back the next day determined to finish writing my manuscript in time to submit. It was truly a bitter-sweet experience.
- My writing suffered after that (mentally and emotionally), and I decided to enter the workforce as an animal care attendant at the local Animal Shelter for the next fourteen months. During this time, I finished my writing correspondence course, tinkered with unpublished novels, then finally woke-up and quit the animal shelter to get back to my writing. I wrote a whole book out of my animal shelter experience, and geared it for my teen psychic mystery series. I sent in that manuscript and got rejected a lot, but one agent showed an interest. He later sent me a lovely rejection letter. Sigh.
- Finally, in 2010, I decided to dust off my time travel story, update the characters and give it a fresh voice. I sent it out—mostly to agents—and got rejected again, and again.
- By this time, I had decided to check out ebooks and how to go about publishing them. Since I owned a graphics shop for over twenty years, I had some business background, and it seemed many authors were being forced to wear two hats in these changing times. So I started a blog in May 2011 to create an on-line presence.
- Then, I entered the 2011 Muskoka Novel Marathon with the idea of doing the prequel for *The Last Timekeeper* series. Two writers there had just signed publishing contracts, so this gave me some hope. I asked if I could use their names as a reference when querying

their publisher. They said, ‘No problem,’ but I’d have to wait until September to query. After the novel marathon, we all exchanged social media info.

- This is where hard work and opportunity collide. One of those writers shared a link on Facebook, which I thought was the publishing company she had signed with. But it wasn’t. It was the link to a new e-publishing company calling for submissions. What the hell, there was nothing to lose while I waited for September to roll in. I sent out my query the end of August, and got a reply within seven days—Musa Publishing wanted to see my manuscript. Excited, yet not getting my hopes up, I sent my young adult time travel manuscript in. They loved it, but wanted revisions. Actually, they wanted a huge, big-ass rewrite that included making the entire book only in one POV, instead of the five I originally had written. Each kid had their own chapter. This publisher only wanted one POV kid per book. So they offered me five books right off the bat.
- I signed the contract September 13th, 2011, with a release date of May 18th, 2012. Plenty of time for rewrites, and plenty of time to learn what’s expected of an author in this new paradigm of publishing. I followed up with the prequel to The Last Timekeepers series, *Legend of the Timekeepers* which came out in August 2013.
- Time travel to 2015 when Musa Publishing closed their doors permanently. That’s when Mirror World Publishing appeared out of the blue, and opened their doors to me. Not only did they take on The Last Timekeepers series, but in 2017 added Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls to their expanding roster of young adult books. Woohoo!
- Now, in 2020 I’m happily juggling both series, while balancing my author life with all the promoting and marketing that must be done to succeed in today’s publishing world.

I’ve certainly come a long way since 1995, and I’m still learning and growing in this crazy writing/publishing business as it continues to evolve. And between us, I’d wager three shiny pennies in a basket that my current publisher won’t be closing their doors anytime soon.

My Meandering #Authorlife Beyond 2020...

Bet y’all are glad to put 2020 to bed, and start 2021 with clean sheets. Actually, we were lucky and blessed in a way as our lives weren’t so disrupted. True, we had to hunker down when everything (except certain stores) closed for a few months due to Covid-19, but our health, safety, and much of our sanity remained intact. Thank God the liquor stores were deemed essential! LOL! Of course plans, celebrations, and milestones went out the window, and my mother had to adjust with no visitors in her nursing home until I was made her essential caregiver in September. Masks became in fashion, and social distancing a requirement. I’ve had so many Covid-19 tests now, I swear my nose wants a divorce!

A shining light in 2020 is that it gave us time to reflect and review our lives and lifestyles. What we liked, what we didn’t, what we needed to get rid of, and what was important to us. Board games became popular again amongst families, as did learning to cook from scratch. We really got back to basics, and slowed down from the hustle, hustle, hustle of the ‘real’ world. I for one was happy for the break. I believe, at least in my author life, I was trying too hard to be like other authors, and not being my authentic author self. Trust me, that’s so exhausting.

So, I continued to post my weekly #authorlife images on my social media platforms to show people how ‘mundane’ an author’s life can really be. It’s not all about meeting readers at book signings, having extravagant book launches, receiving eye-popping advances from publishers, and making movie deals with our books (though that would be nice). The idea is to be present, connect, and engage. That’s all. Writers know there’s a lot of sweat equity behind showing up to write, whether blog posts, articles, or full blown novels. Not to mention (but I will) the hours spent creating marketing plans, posting ads on all your social media accounts, and constantly promoting your back list of books. An author’s life is also a fine balance between being there for your family, friends, or pets, as well as doing important tasks like housework, cooking, laundry, and grocery shopping. Add dealing with an unexpected pandemic, and you’ve got to juggle a whole lot more! Or...you can choose to drop those balls and focus on what you really want. At the end of 2020, I was blessed to be quoted on author Colleen Story’s Writing and Wellness annual quote round-up post, which I’ll share with you here:

“Trust that inner voice of yours....Write what’s important to you, what you want to say, in whatever genre you’re compelled to write in....Know that you’ll be in it for the long haul if you want to make it as a career writer, so don’t give up on your dreams.”

~**Sharon Ledwith**

I never did give up. My hope is that you won’t either. May the words be always with you!

Cheers, and wishing you all the best in your publishing endeavors,

~ Sharon

Sharon Ledwith is the author of the middle-grade/young adult time travel adventure series, THE LAST TIMEKEEPERS, and the teen psychic mystery series, MYSTERIOUS TALES FROM FAIRY FALLS. When not writing, researching, or revising, she enjoys reading, exercising, anything arcane, and an occasional dram of scotch. Sharon lives a serene, yet busy life in a southern tourist region of Ontario, Canada, with her spoiled hubby, and a moody calico cat.

Learn more about **Sharon Ledwith** on her [WEBSITE](#) and [BLOG](#). Look up her [AMAZON AUTHOR](#) page for a list of current books. Stay connected on [FACEBOOK](#), [TWITTER](#), [PINTEREST](#), [LINKEDIN](#), [INSTAGRAM](#), and [GOODREADS](#).

Sharon Ledwith

YA Author. Time Traveler. Psychic Sleuth.

Escape to the past and have a blast

Escapism Fiction is the genre where readers can delve into the pages of wildly creative fiction and leave their mundane lives behind. Sharon Ledwith’s young adult books give the reader this and more. Whether it’s going back in time with a group of teenage time travelers tasked with

keeping history safe, or visiting the small tourist town of Fairy Falls to solve a mystery alongside a psychic teen, these books are geared to entertain and inspire.

Series Overview

The Last Timekeepers Time Travel Adventures...

Chosen by an Atlantean Magus to be Timekeepers—legendary time travelers sworn to keep history safe from the evil Belial—five classmates are sent into the past to restore balance, and bring order back into the world, one mission at a time.

Children are the keys to our future. And now, children are the only hope for our past.

Mysterious Tales from Fairy Falls Teen Psychic Mysteries...

In the small, quiet tourist town of Fairy Falls, a new-to-town teen, an unlikely hero who possesses an unusual psychic ability, is drawn into a murder mystery and is tasked with uncovering corrupt truths that threaten the town's future.

Welcome to Fairy Falls. Expect the unexpected.