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Knock-Out Writer's Block: Listening To Your Inner Voice

By Celise Downs

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When I was young, I used to talk to myself. Long, drawn out, one-sided conversations. I didn't have an imaginary friend, I just talked to myself. My mother says that's why I became a writer: because of my overactive imagination. I admit she may be right. Those conversations currently get me through my worst cases of writer's block.

I have to laugh when I read articles on breaking through a writing slump. They always have tips like: go to the mall and make up a story about the people you see there..or..write down a dream you had the other night..or..think about the happiest moment in your childhood and write about it. You can even sign up and have a writing "prompt" emailed to you everyday. And I can't help but think, Does this work for anyone? I mean, really? I've come to discover that I'm not like the average author. The normal methods of combating writer's block do not apply to me. In writing mode, I can only concentrate on one novel at a time. I get distracted easily, so writing something on the fly only leads me down one path: The-Hey-I-Just-Came-Up-With-Another-Great-Idea-For-A-New-Book-So-I'm-Gonna-Drop-The-One-I'm-Currently-Angsting-Over-And-Start-A-New-Novel path. Believe me, it's happened before. I was young (seventh grade to be exact), just starting out, and I didn't know any better.

Now, I just put the novel away..and wait. The wait has been known to last six months to a year. Sometimes longer. For others, the time frame may be shorter, but eventually they will come. The inner voices, I mean. I no longer hold verbal one-sided conversations with myself. My characters have one-sided conversations with me..in my head. When they start talking to me about dialogue and plot, that tells me it's time to pull out the novel and jump in again.

So, go on. You try it: Open up your mind and listen to your inner voice. If we ever meet at a conference or a book signing and you tell me that you've been hearing voices, I won't think you're crazy. I promise.

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Celise is a Young Adult fiction author and owner of Gemini Mojo Press. Her books, "Secrets and Kisses" (Mar 2004) and "Dance Jam Productions" (Sept 2004), are currently available on the publisher

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Thawing Your Writer's Block

By Mary Anne Hahn

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When I go through bouts of writer's block, my fingers stiffen, and my brain goes as blank as the snowy screen of a television on the fritz.

I don't know about you, but I picture writer's block as something cold—like the frozen engine of a car in the dead of winter, or the way your PC sometimes "freezes up" on you when your system gets too busy.

Looking at it that way actually helps to overcome it. Rather than feeling like you are grasping at fog, visualizing writer's block as something three-dimensional can provide you with both the strength to confront it, and the weapons to conquer it.

How can you thaw your writer's block of ice? Try any or all of the following:

1. Chip away at it. No need to write "War and Peace" in one sitting; Tolstoy certainly didn't. Fifteen minutes a day are all you need to give your writing dream some life and structure. Use them to write anything, anything at all—as many article ideas as you can think of, a synopsis of a story idea, a climactic scene in your novel, a limerick, a character sketch, step by step instructions for making the perfect omelet or what you would do if you won the lottery.

Have some fun with these 15-minute exercises, and you'll probably rediscover the truth in the adage that "time flies" when you do.

2. Light a match to it. By this I mean, don't think about the fact that you are not currently writing; rather, think about why you ever wanted to be a writer in the first place. Better yet, *write* about why you want to be a writer. Do you have stories burning inside you that need to be told? Or do you see writing as your key to personal fulfillment or freedom? Melt away writer's block by reigniting your passion for writing—the old daydreams, the past feelings of triumph or accomplishment when you finished a piece of work.

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3. Carve a sculpture out of it. If you simply can't break it down or melt it away, make something from your writer's block of ice. As I did above, write about how you feel when you experience writer's

block, or what you think writer's block looks like. Maybe look for humor in it ("What did one writer's block say to the other?" "Nothing—it couldn't find the right words!" Okay, that's a bit lame, but you get the idea).

Whenever writer's block tries to come between you and your writing aspirations, don't try to avoid it. Instead, face it head on. Play with it, laugh at it, scoff at it, or befriend it. Make it something that you can take into your hands and deal with.

Turn it into one more tool that you can use to achieve your writing success.

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of "WriteSuccess," THE biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for writers. To subscribe, <mailto:writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>



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