

MOTIVATION

by Lori Foster

Sheesh, I have no time to be motivated! Deadlines loom, inspiration stirs, and the drive to make a name for myself is there, it really is! But motivation? I'd rather take a nap.

So why am I writing? Why wouldn't I? Even though this day is not the best, I brushed my teeth this morning and took a shower. Ok, so those things are more routine for some than writing. I also found the energy to kiss and hug the kids, to give sympathy to the sick hubby, which are things I enjoyed. I did laundry and cleaned the bathrooms -- things I didn't enjoy. And I fed my ever-empty stomach.

Then I decided I needed to feed my brain. I read a good book, which was just the added incentive I needed to get me going this morning. To me, writing is as essential as everything else I do -- routine or not. I have no choice. I may not always be enthusiastic about it -- but then, I wasn't all that enthusiastic about getting up this morning. Not with only a few hours sleep. Still, we do what we must. If you always wait for enthusiasm, for the "muse to strike," well, you're not really a writer.

Reading a good book always helps me redefine my motivation for writing. I want to perfect my skill -- every day and every book. I want to do whatever I can within my power to push my career along at a satisfactory pace. And I want to see my stories come to life, because every time I get one out of my head, I get to move on to another.

Does this mean I write every day? No. Does it mean I have a schedule? No way. I hate schedules, but my life as a mother and wife and friend doesn't allow for set schedules anyway. What it does mean is that I write when opportunities present themselves. And I don't turn anything in late -- I turn it in early.

Placing our time and those priorities that are important only to ourselves in the to-be-done category is the tough part for many. That's why I choose to believe my writing is as important as brushing my teeth and eating. It's simply something I do. Sometimes I'm more energetic about it, but either way, it gets done.

Still, many writers deal with this dilemma in different ways. My no nonsense, just-do-it attitude might not work for someone else. There's one thing for certain in the writing business: each author has to find the way that works best for her. So I've gathered a few bits of inspiration, and hopefully among these gems of wisdom you'll find a way that agrees with you.

Pam McCutcheon replied that she's motivated in different ways for different reasons. "Since I quit my day job a year ago, I've been very motivated to get proposals out so I can hopefully sell some books so I don't have to go back to work. Finding a project I really want to write motivates me to sit down at the keyboard, and having deadlines is VERY motivating for me -- of whatever kind."

I'd like to interject here that Pam hit on a piece of advice I give to anyone with enough patience to listen to me. If you're bored with a section of your manuscript, the reader will be bored also. Don't force yourself through it. Rethink the circumstances, the plot, the characters, whatever! But get life back into the story so you're anxious to write that particular scene. Trust yourself, and don't be afraid to switch tactics when necessary.

Deb Stover, ever the practical person, supplied some very applicable tips to this article. "I get a lot done because I spend a lot of time doing it. I get up at 4:30 a.m. and write for a couple of hours before the kids get up, then I get them off to school and tackle it all over again. I write whenever I can-- every chance I get. While I'm on deadline -- a situation I look forward

to with much anticipation <g> -- I've been known to write 12- 14 hours per day, though never non-stop. Anyone with small children knows that's impossible!

"And I prioritize. Housework always takes a backseat to writing. Another thing is I try very hard not to schedule appointments or errands during the day when my kids are in school. I schedule them very early or very late (hopefully when my oldest one can babysit), so I don't waste those precious hours when I can write uninterrupted sitting in a doctor's office or something. Groceries and laundry? Weekends!"

Val Taylor, who is the mother of two young children, had a gentler, more accepting approach to meeting her individual goals. "I need 'mental health' breaks on a regular basis -- times when, even though my kids are gone, I don't write or do anything really productive. Sometimes a half-hour, sometimes a full day. Sometimes they've lasted for weeks at a time, when I was really feeling down or confused or frustrated about the way writing was going. In general, when the kids are gone, I work. But if I can't, if I just can't face it, I try not to be too hard on myself.

"I go playing for that period of time, if I can get away with it. Then when I buckle down an hour later, or the next day, I feel like I've given myself what I needed and I'm really ready to work."

Rachelle Nelson is another author who doesn't feel she has to write at specific times. "How do I stay motivated? If you're talking on a daily basis, I don't. But if I hear of someone recently selling, or I've read a wonderful book (or even a bad one sometimes), it both inspires and motivates me to plant my butt in the seat. Talking writing with others, be it in person, over the phone, over the net... tends to motivate me. If I've written a great scene, it motivates me. Fan mail and complimentary remarks motivate me.

Lusting after another contract -- THAT motivates me. <vbg> I have no grand goals, only to write the best I can and touch somebody with my work, because without readers I don't have a career. Anything beyond that is simply perks along the way. I'm a night owl -- with four kids ranging from 2 to 12, I don't seem to have a choice if I want peace and quiet. Plus my husband works odd hours, so I pretty much have to go around his schedule, so no, I don't keep regular hours. Sometimes I write like crazy for two weeks. Little sleep, little food, lots of coffee. No one bugs me when I'm in this mode. Other times I wander around talking to my characters, and that's when my kids ask for stuff because I'm in 'writer's mode' and they can get anything they want. I don't remember a thing!"

I couldn't include all the posts, but I got the general feel that writers don't push themselves when the inspiration isn't with them. Like Val and Rachelle, they sometimes need to rejuvenate. But I also found that many writers in the middle of a book let it take over their thoughts. They keep the characters in their heads most of their waking hours -- and many of the dreaming hours. This helps to keep the motivation going, because the characters come to life and from that life, scenes and conflicts evolve that naturally need to be put down on paper.

I saved this next reply for last, because for me, it represents the generosity of writers, both in time and expertise, and most especially in encouragement.

Sherry Lewis said, "When I first started writing, what motivated me was the desire to quit my evil day job and write full time. I got up early, even on weekends (5 am) and I stayed up until my head dropped onto the keyboard every night. Four years after I started my first serious book, I quit! I'm now a full-time writer. So what motivates me now? The need to continue doing this full time for the rest of my life. To never go back. Even though I'm not working at another job anymore, I still get up early. I'm a morning person, so I create best in the wee hours. And I still stay up late. Habit, I guess. "I'm not motivated by popularity, though I wouldn't turn it down if it came.

I am motivated to write the best books I can. I don't dream of riches -- just making enough to live on fairly comfortably. But I'd love to make enough money to help others who have talent and dreams, but who can't afford to pursue them. When I first started writing, I wanted desperately to take a class, but I couldn't afford the measly \$28 enrollment fee. I had to borrow the money from my oldest daughter, who, thankfully, was working and had the money to lend. I'm sure there are many people out there with talent and dreams, but without the means to take that first step, and I'd love to pay back my debt by helping others."

To me, the contributions to articles like these, the generosity of time spent in workshops and giving classes, or simply sharing experiences over the net, is repayment in full. Romance authors just seem to naturally share and network with each other.

Having such great friends supplies plenty of motivation for many. Thanks all!