

One Day at a Time **Everything old is new again**

New year, same old waiting game.

Whether we're published or not, we're all waiting for something in our writing journey. To hear back from an editor, an agent, a reviewer, a contest. And as a new year starts, it's a common practice to take a minute to reevaluate all that we've accomplished, and all we still want to do.

Write down your goals, the experts say. Say them out loud, claim them, and you will be victorious. But what if you did that last year, and so far the lightning hasn't struck? If this kind of predicament has left you discouraged of late, rest assured, you're in good company.

I wax philosophical at times about the concept of life being a journey, but an unfortunate side effect of that perspective is that I sometimes slip into a funk about my current position on the map. Especially when another year's gone by, and I'm not much further down the road than I was last year this time. And look at all the colleagues zooming past me in the fast lane! Setting goals can be very motivational, but they can sometimes work against you when you're creeping at a snail's pace toward the ultimate prize. The next book, that one will be THE ONE. If you could only win that contest. If only that agent would finally see your brilliance for what it is.

Intellectually, we know there's no magic pill for finding contentment in where we are. Other writers have achieved what we desire, and interestingly enough, they've simply moved on to worrying about something new. But it'll be different for us, we rationalize. Just give us this one chance, throw us a bone, and we'll be ready to take on the world!

This January I looked back through my file of goals, at the years of hoping and waiting gone by. And that's when the trap of unfulfilled expectation struck. Maybe I was just kidding myself. Maybe it was time to find a new set of goals. Dreams that were a little less impossible to finesse into reality. 2003 was a good writing year for me, by anyone's standards. But the ultimate goal was still sitting there at the top of my list, flashing in neon, right where it's been for the last four years. New year, same old waiting game.

That's when a friend reminded me of what I hope everyone can remember, if you find yourself having the same debilitating, albeit perfectly justifiable, pity party. Over-focusing on the final goal of publishing my first book was a mistake. Allowing myself to judge all I've done, or all I intend to do over the coming year, by that one standard was a disaster waiting to stop me in my tracks. It makes about as much sense as a six-year-old child, a first grader, charting out the years and hours of schooling ahead and deciding he's a failure because he hasn't graduated from high school yet. The goals, my friend reminded me, are about helping me celebrate the mini-steps along the way, not necessarily about speeding up a process I often have very little control over.

If I wasn't careful, my fear of never reaching my goal could have become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I had two full manuscripts with editors who seemed determined never to read them, and I had an agent expecting something new and brilliant on her desk as soon as possible--so we'd have something else to pitch, just in case. The goal setter in me knew finishing the new proposal was my next step, but the first-grader deep within had had enough and was starting to mutter, "Why bother!"

Thanks to my friend, I returned to my habit of setting and tracking daily writing goals. I committed myself to a certain number of hours a day, a certain number of pages a week. I put off worrying about sending yet another unsolicited partial out to an editor who doesn't have the time to eat lunch, let alone read my work. Just write, my friend said. Write something every day. Fall in love with your dreams again. Take it one day at a time.

Three weeks into the New Year, I'd reclaimed a bit of the balance in my writing life. Ten pages away from completing another three-chapter partial, I was enraptured with my new story, when just weeks before I honestly couldn't have cared less. I was in a good place, grounded in the journey, ready to wait my turn

some more.

And, dear readers, that's when I received the best call of my life. That magical call from someone in Canada who had decided to take hold of my list of goals and give every last one of them a massive shake. Yes, I sold my first manuscript yesterday. YES! Victory at last. And the real victory, I quickly realized, came when I told my editor that I could have a new proposal to her as soon as she'd like see it. That I'd been working hard on the next idea while I waited to hear back from her. That I was confident she'd love this new story even more than the one she'd just bought. All because of my friend, all of my writing friends through the years, who've helped me focus on the work I had to do, one day at a time, so that when the call came, I was ready to do business.

I'm so blessed to be traveling with you all!