

Would you believe, Dear Reader, that I sat down in January and began composing this piece only to be distracted by life events and then failed to return to the project?

Today, on this dreary February afternoon, while I hunker down during a tornado watch and try not to jump as the thunder shakes the house and lightning flashes, I'm attempting to finish writing this.

When, at long last, you get to read this, we'll likely be in the early days of March, and so it may seem a bit strange to be discussing goals for the year ahead. But, here we are because what else should one talk about while riding out a storm and watching the temperature drop forty degrees in a relatively short time?

I could indulge you in many stories about storms, and I'll confess there are some great ones. But then I'd likely run into the same problem we had in January. Thus, I think it wise if I get right down to business.

I know many people do not set resolutions for the New Year. In fact, my husband is so opposed to them, and has such strong feelings about it, that I put some of those very opinions into one of my [Nano characters one year](#). The thing is, I'm not big on resolutions either, but I do like goals.

You might wonder what the difference is, and I confess that at first glance aside from length of word and spelling it may feel like there is a little difference. I think of goals as something you decide you will or will not do, and then make a plan so you have tangible ways to achieve the goals. Resolutions, at least for myself, were something I hoped to do, but since I never wrote them down they really never happened.

Each year while I set a variety of goals in different aspects of my life, I also set writing goals. They vary from year to year, depending on the season of life I'm in, but 2023 has offered me a fresh new season of life where I can spend a large chunk of my day locked away in [my little nook](#) writing. Or, at least attempting to write.

Having goals and sticking with them will keep me on track for the bigger picture. And

honestly, I function best with a plan— even if I derail so often people begin to doubt I ever had a plan.

This year, I have three writing goals. On paper they look pretty simple, but I know that they will take a lot of action on a daily basis on my behalf in order to complete.

Goal 1: *Submit finished manuscript into competition*

This is probably the most simplistic writing goal I have this year. I need to reread through the manuscript I revised and polished last year, or at least the first few chapters. Then I'll be sending those chapters off for professional feedback before I submit it into a writing competition.

I've lost track of just how many times I've rewritten this particular manuscript. It's run through a dozen Beta Readers, and it's time to send it off into the world to see what happens. While I did submit it last year to a competition too, I figured we'd give it one more go before deciding what the next plan is.

Goal 2: *Clean up the manuscripts from NaNoWriMo*

This goal is likely to eat up the majority of my time when writing, as it will be my primary focus. This year, much like last, I have a lot of editing and rewriting to do with my [Nano projects from November of 2022](#).

Yes, that was plural, because I did the unthinkable and tackled two projects at once. I have this little rule in life that is pretty simple: Never say never. Why? Because every time I say never to a situation I soon find myself neck deep in it.

Point in case, I swore I would *never* write a story inside a story. Who does that? It's insane, it would take so much effort, and you'd basically need two plots and not just one plus all the

millions of side quests, and — Goal #1's manuscript is a story within a story.

And then there's [Nano](#), where I said I would never work on more than one project at a time in the chaos that is November. Why? Because I'm one of those strange writers who has to get into the heads of their characters. I have to think the story out, tell it to myself, and at times I've been known to act it out. How on earth could anyone do that with two stories at once?

So what did I do? I wrote two stories at once, because apparently I forgot my own life rule to *never say never*! And the best part is, that by the time November ended I'd racked up 203,912 words over the two projects. And yet, one lacked a solid opening and the other had no ending. The predicament really did make me laugh.

Why on earth did I bite off such a writing challenge? In the shortest answer ever: It's a long term game plan. You see I had two story ideas, both of which were keeping me awake at night and begging to be written.

My theory was that when I got jammed on one story, I could bounce to the other. No matter how well planned my story may be in my imagination, there's always a roadblock or a hurdle.

But there's also the knowledge that if one chooses self-publication over a traditional publication house, it's heavily advised to release three books in a reasonably short amount of time. While I'm undecided as of yet, despite the numerous calls from publishing companies, as to which path I will take, I wanted to know that if I chose the self-publication method I'd be able to put the books out in a reasonable time frame.

Goal 3: *Post more frequently on [Ink Stained Paper Cuts](#)*

This final goal was to focus a little bit on this corner of the internet each week. The theory is that people who are willing to read what I post here each week, might be just as willing to read a book I write.

The issue is, that when I'm neck deep in writing book length pieces I struggle to surface and put together a short story that would require editing, rewriting, running it past a few sets of eyes, making further adjustments, and then eventually sharing it here with all of you.

That doesn't mean I will never share stories here again, it means that the majority of the content might look different than short stories. I hope you'll still enjoy reading it anyway.



Not to leave you completely high and dry without a good story, I think I might just indulge you in a micro story about a storm. When we lived back on the [Island](#), storms were much fewer, and were far less damaging compared to storms back here in the Mountains.

We lived in a home directly across from the beach, and there was something quite captivating about sitting and watching the storms at sea. The horizon would start out a shade of a purple bruise before turning into the dark stormy gray that allowed one to see the bolts of lightning as they erupted from the sky. We could sit in the comfort and peace of our home and watch the storm, grateful that we were not within it.

It's not that storms never reached shore, they did on occasion, but often they were mild. Yet, one day such a storm did reach the shore, and blew inland. The wind was fiercer than normal, with warnings to tie things down, and not permit small children out of the house alone. Of course the fiercest part of the storm, the raging thunder and lightning hit sometime in the wee hours of the night.

Our youngest, petrified of storms, had already fled to the safety that was our bed. He'd very happily taken up more than his own fair share of space and sunken into the oblivion of sleep that can only come from knowing you are safe, until a clap of thunder shook the house so fiercely that I may have squealed just a little bit.

While attempting to comfort one child, I shouted down the hall to the other, asking him if he was fine. He assured us he was, and that he was far too warm and comfy in his own bed to be bothered moving. And so, we all attempted to settle back down for sleep. Until the next clap of thunder rattled windows!

The pitter patter of feet on the bare wooden floor could be heard as our eldest had raced from his bed and was heading straight for us. “It turns out, that one was so loud it made my tummy jump,” he told us gasping for air as he jumped head first into the bed.

While the kids got plenty of sleep that night, neither my husband or I did. I’m grateful now, for kids who, mostly, sleep through storms. Or, perhaps more correctly I should say that I sleep through storms. Remember the tornado watch I mentioned earlier? The night was incredibly calm when we went to bed, we checked in with the emergency statement and learned that we’d been downgraded to severe thunderstorms, and off to bed we went.

The next morning the house was incredibly quiet when I woke. I moved through my normal routine of quietly reading through my devotional, Bible, and other morning book stash. Then I made my way down the hall to my yoga mat where I happily stretched all the creaks and stiffness out of my joints. I paused in front of the window and frowned as I noticed the road was flooded. That sounds more terrible than it is, any amount of rain seems to cause that in our area.

By the time I made my way downstairs and had made breakfast people began to emerge from their beds. They all looked downright miserable, and yawns were aplenty. Sitting down with my breakfast and fancy ice packs, I smiled and said, “I guess the weather people got it wrong.”

Three people stared at me, bags under their eyes, trying not to yawn.

“What? I mean, it didn’t storm last night, so I guess there was no need for that warning.”

This time they looked at each other before looking at me. My husband’s eyebrows raised

slightly. My youngest rolled his eyes, and my eldest shook his head.

I stared at them watching some secret messages being passed around.

“Did I miss something?”

“The storm!” It was said in unison as they gave that look that is trying to decide if I’m being serious or not.

“You’re having me on, I didn’t hear a thing!”

As it turns out, Dear Readers, they were not having me on. There was a mini party at 4am around the windows as some of them watched the storm, just making sure that the local tornado siren didn’t go off. There was thunder and lightning, and rain coming down so loud none of them could sleep. When they finished giving me the run down and I started to chuckle, until the reports started rolling in about the storm.

And the really crazy part of the whole story is, that’s not the first time I’ve slept through a wild storm before either. Once, many years ago while we were visiting the Mountains while still living back on the Island. We went to bed to coyotes howling and a raging storm brewing. The kids clambered into bed with us. After realizing that there was not enough room, I pulled myself from the bed, took a blanket and pillow and curled up on a sofa that was in the same room.

When the sun finally woke me, I sat up, smiled and said, “Wow that was a great night of sleep, wasn’t it?” Three very pale people stared back at me, eyes wide as saucers. Apparently, they’d spent the entire night up, while thunder had echoed off mountains and around the house, lightning lit up the sky, and when the storm had passed the coyotes returned to their nightly song.

Rumor has it that I might get a personal invite to the next storm party. But, I’m doubtful, because I learned today there was another storm last night- and once again I slept through

it.

The Reluctant Author 