I was asked a question recently that made me smile. It hit all those little things that I work on when creating characters and writing stories, and made me want to gush about the hidden details, the tiny aspects I don't know if anyone will notice because it might be based on something real that I witnessed.

The question asked was: *What inspired your supporting characters? How did you come up with their names and personalities?* I'm pretty sure I was grinning like a Cheshire cat, because one thing that I can yammer on about for far too long, is often something I'm writing. I once had a friend say, "You come to life when you're talking about your story." That's not to say I will always gush and talk for ages about what I'm writing, but there are those times. It's a little harder here, because I don't want to spoil the story and all its hidden surprises.

1. What inspired your supporting characters?

The book that instantly comes to mind with this question is the one I wrapped up earlier this year. I've referred to it a few times, and the supporting characters would be 1 best friend, and three brothers. This is also the book that was inspired by a single 5 second or less clip in a show I once watched. In a large way the main character and his best bud originated from that clip just as much as the story did. I changed them, though, to fit the story I was writing compared to the story in the show.

I'm not sure what inspired the brothers, in fact I went back and forth about writing one of the three out of the manuscript. Somewhere in the bank box of print-outs, there is a copy where that brother doesn't appear at all. In another version of the story he's there, but his wife was written out. The funny thing about revisions is that sometimes you have to completely remove characters to see if the balance will remain.

Each brother has their own personality. One is laid back and quiet. Another is loud and tends to grate people's nerves. The third is more level headed then the rest. And the fourth is in quite the pickle when you meet him. But they weren't based on anyone in particular.

2. How did you come up with their names?

This portion of the question made me snort, yes a very loud and undignified snort. I have a weird rule of thumb when I write. It's not complicated. Simply put: **The first name that comes to mind is what the character is stuck with.**

Most of the time this is not an issue. Oh look, we need a cashier, let's call her Eve. And now we need a postman, shall we call him Patrick? These are not real characters, just what came to mind as I wrote the above sentence.

When I write, I tend to do the same thing. But with the story I'm referencing, it wasn't quite like that. The main character had a name, and then I changed it, only to change it back again. I know, I broke the rule and if I'd stuck with it, I wouldn't have had to slog through 500 pages to find each and every reference to the character just to change his name. Twice.

Wait, wait.. I hear you, I know exactly what you're about to ask me. Why didn't I just use the find and replace feature in my writing program? Ahh, that leads me to one of the supporting characters. I couldn't settle on a name for him. I could see the character when I closed my eyes, when I put his actions on paper, but his name was evading me. It felt a lot like when you run into someone in the store and you're aware they know you, and you're certain you should know them, but no matter how hard you try you can't pull up their name.

There I sat with this important supporting character and each time he tried to tell me his name I swear he lowered his voice just enough that I couldn't make it out. So, I called him a few different things, until I settled on Bill. The problem was, my main character's name is Ben. I now had Bill and Ben, and if you're familiar with the old Aussie Flower Pot Men show you'll understand why I had no choice but to change the name. There was also the fact that Bill didn't really fit my character. It just felt all wrong, but there it was in my manuscript. When I settled on a name that was perfect and fit, I had 500 pages worth of story to edit in order to change that guy's name. I pulled up the trusty ol' find and replace feature.

 You know what happened, right? I've mentioned the outcome before. The program missed a single use of his name way back in chapter one. And when I shared that chapter with a critique group, I started getting messages asking, "*who the hell is Bill?*" I had no idea who Bill was, or what on earth they were talking about. Not until I realized they were referring to the

story. Imagine, a half dozen people knowing I'd previously named this guy Bill! And then I knew what was going on, and after getting over the embarrassment of the situation I laughed until I couldn't breathe.

As for the other three brothers, their names came about with my old fashioned handy dandy writing rule: **Use the first name that comes to mind and keep writing**. There are 0 inspirational stories I can share about those names. They just happened.

3. How did you come up with their personalities?

This was the portion of the question that had me grinning like a fool. While the story does contain some hard spots and broken relationships that need healing, there's also a lot of playful banter that occurs between multiple characters. Almost every drop of it was inspired by my own children. There were moments when I was writing, and my characters ended up in a situation where one of them would say something that made me laugh. It took me a while to realize that a lot of the sarcasm one of them oozes with seems to have been heavily inspired by my youngest.

I told him that when the characters get themselves back into a corner, I just close my eyes, channel my youngest and think, "What would The Scoffer say?" Ninety-nine times out of one hundred it fits perfectly into my scene.

While working away one cold winter afternoon both boys came bursting into my writing area, they'd been discussing one thing or another and hadn't decided who'd advocate for their opinion better. I, on the other hand, didn't care two bits about what they were squabbling about, instead I told them to sit down because I'd written something they absolutely had to hear.

The Researcher sighed and prepared himself, while The Scoffer complained bitterly and said he doubted what I was writing would be for him, and reminded me that since new snow had fallen we should be making peach cobbler. Minutes later one was snorting trying not to laugh and the other had his arms crossed with a smirk on his face. When I asked them how it was, The Researcher pointed out it sounded an awful lot like what The Scoffer would say, and how

we'd all respond to him. I fist bumped the air, and told them to prepare the peaches.

I'm not going to say that everything my characters say when being sassy, sarcastic, or trying to break tension has been inspired by my boys, but most of it has. Which is why The Scoffer says, "But I've never said that!" Which is true, because, as I told him, "You've just never been in that situation."

Not to mention I've taken plenty of artistic liberty. Still if I had to pick one person who inspired at least one of my supporting characters, I wouldn't miss a beat in pointing to my youngest.

Author's Note:

Dearest Reader,

I hope you won't be too irritated that I didn't name which specific character was most inspired by The Scoffer. It's hard to give too many details away to a book that isn't for sale yet, and I also wouldn't want someone to read the story and then believe the made-up character is my son.

The above story is prepared and ready to be sent out into the world, or at least to land on a few desks. It's quite a terrifying thought, really. When one works so hard on a project and then passes it around, we always want to hear that it was delightful and kept people reading, but in reality that's not always how it goes down.

And sometimes, that can be difficult to hear. When one spends months, and in some cases years, breathing life and soul into a story it's always hard to hear that it needs further work. More editing, less words, more words, stronger dialogue. Or whatever the reader cries for.

As crazy as it may sound, handing over a completed story is a lot like saying: "Here's my baby, I worked really hard on this, and I hope you love it. If you don't, let me down as

tenderly as possible."

My hope is that the hands(s) my story lands in will at least enjoy what they read.