

A Day in the Life - Volunteering

By Tami Brothers

If you're looking for a way to help motivate yourself and your writing, I suggest volunteering.

Ugh! I can hear the screams of frustration. What in the world is she talking about? How is giving away my precious spare time going to help with my writing?

First of all, let's define what I mean by volunteering. I can relate to being a stay-at-home mom where everyone will call you to 'help' out with something. Extra-curricular activities, class room helper, soccer mom (or dad). Wait for the delivery man, pick up the dry cleaning, help with the car pool. It all adds up and can quickly fill up that 'free' time everyone covets. This is not what I mean by volunteering.

With all of this and then returning to work full-time, I had no time to write. I spent several years making excuses for my lack of page production. AWOL muse. Young children. Lack of education. Agent/Editor rejections. Poor contest responses. No motivation.

All of these excuses played a roll in keeping me from my computer. Yet, I failed to evict the characters swimming around inside my head. They were slowly driving me crazy as they screamed to come alive. Although I wanted to write them down, I had to first find the time somewhere.

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Finally, I came up with an idea during the annual GRW Christmas party when the Volunteer Coordinator pleaded with the members to volunteer. She had a ton of positions needing to be filled and no one willing to give up a few minutes to help out. At that moment, I decided to give back a little of the help I'd been receiving as a member of Georgia Romance Writers. I hoped this would help motivate my writing.

I started off by volunteering for the greeters table before the monthly meetings. Since starting this, I've met a ton of people. Even though we've all been coming to the meetings for years, I'd never spoken to more than twenty or so others and only then because I'd met them while sitting at their table. Darn writers and their tendency to isolate themselves!

When an announcement was made asking someone to take over the monthly Member's Doin's column, I offered up my services. This too has been an eye opening experience as I'm usually one of the first people to congratulate others on contest wins, agent requests, and new books coming out.

Most recently, I overheard the Maggie Chairperson searching for a coordinator to help with the un-published Maggie contest and decided what the heck. I'll give it a try. Since then, I've gained a tremendous amount of respect for what goes on behind the scenes of a writers contest. Never again will I whine about formatting and deadlines. Not that I ever did. Really!

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These are just a few of the ways I've found to volunteer my time in the writing world. There are many more positions currently sitting vacant, needing someone willing to give a few hours of their time to keep this organization running smoothly. There are jobs big and small, ranging from food dishes to bring to the potluck Christmas party to someone needed to check in attendees at the Moonlight and Magnolias Writer's Conference in September. Not that big of a deal, but essential.

But what does all of this have to do with helping you motivate yourself and your writing? Simple. By volunteering for something writing related, you are keeping writing front and center in your life. By helping with the Maggies, I had that deadline to look at. Each time I received an entry for the category I coordinated, I was reminded that I needed to get my submission in the mail. With two articles due by the 15th of each month for the Galley, I have to get my head into writing mode or I would've let down a promise I made when I took on the responsibility.

You can do a little volunteering or a lot. Either way, you will be rewarded. Not only will you be helping yourself, but you will be helping others in the same position you are. You will find friends who can relate to the fickle muse and you will feel like you are part of a group. But if you don't do anything, then you're still stuck in the same rut trying to find the time write, making excuses and never telling the story you were meant to tell.