

A Question Of Creativity

There's something that happens every time I do a book signing, or some other author event that causes me to brave the outside world and meet the reading public face-to-face; they stand there in front of my table and stare in amazement at the twelve stacks of original work I've had published over the last decade or so. That look of amazement grows even brighter when they inspect the books closely and realize that I've written a book in nearly every genre – science fiction, literary, poetry, short story, children's picture book, a humorous memoir, horror, mystery and thriller. I secretly love when this happens, it validates the time, sweat, tears, frustration and work I spent writing them.

I love it even more when I begin a conversation with said reader and tell them that I always have at least half a dozen other manuscripts in the hopper waiting to be published – that look of amazement swiftly turns to utter disbelief. You should see it, it's truly a joy to witness! But I don't stop there, oh no, I go on to tell them what I'm working on at the present time then I tell them about how I start a new novel every year during the week of my birthday in late-November but in the summer I write primarily short stories (this is because life in the summertime, especially if you have a big family, can intrude on a writer's time, concentration and energy). At this point the said reader's head explodes and I end up spending the rest of the day cleaning up the mess with a mop and a bucket...just kidding!

Seriously, though, at a recent book signing I actually had another local author come, stare at my stacks of work and then, instead of displaying that familiar look of amazement, he shook his head and confessed to me that I had just thoroughly sent him into a severe bout of depression. I was taken aback by this revelation. He clarified his comment by telling me that he's a middle-aged author who'd only had one book published and that seeing all those books on the table made him feel like a slacker.

Well, that certainly wasn't my intention. I would rather be known as a writer who inspires other writers to write. I can't help the fact that I'm prolific and I don't feel the need to apologize for it. Then I thought about exactly what he'd said and realized he was, in his own way, just giving me a compliment. We have since grown to become friends who respect each other's work and he's even published a second book!

But I digress...After the said reader's head metaphorically explodes, the inevitable question always follows: *Where do you get your ideas?*

It's the dreaded question every published writer is asked at some point in his/her career and there's not a damn thing you can do about it but bite your tongue and answer it as best as you can. I know this sounds rude but there are two things a reader must understand; the first is that any writer worth his salt lives in a constant state of creativity - the writer is immersed in it, breathes it, eats it, drinks it, showers in it and yes, even sleeps in it. It's in everything the writer sees, smells, hears, tastes and touches. It's in the way someone phrases a memorable statement, it's in the way someone looks at you, the way someone walks, acts or believes. It's in the smallest and biggest of things, like the way a flower can be carnivorous or the specific scent a breeze carries with it on a summer night. It's in the way a cloud catches a ray of light or the way a giant 747 lands on the tarmac or the way a tornado breathes itself full of life. To a writer, creative possibilities are everywhere and never ending.

The second thing a reader must understand about a writer is that a writer assumes everyone is living in this same, unending creative world he/she is living in. It being such a huge, normal part of the writer's everyday life, it actually comes as a surprise when he/she meets someone with little or no creativity or imagination. When this poor person's malady does finally sink in, we pity him/her for a mini-micro-second, readjust our thinking then realize that's it's all right, because our job is to fill those sadly empty, foreign imaginations with people and sounds and pictures and possibilities. Humanity can easily be split into two groups of people, those who read and those who write (There is a third group, *people who don't read*, but writers don't acknowledge them because they're truly lazy, lost souls).

So here's what I'm going to do...I'm going to try to answer that dreaded question: *Where do you get your ideas?* as specifically and truthfully as possible, just remember that I'm only speaking for myself. I leave other writers to their own devices...

The most important thing a writer must do is have his/her mind constantly open and receptive for the possibility of an idea. A bank vault can't be filled with cash unless the door is open. Here's an example: A few years ago my son became a firefighter for the City of Fox Lake, Illinois, it was an absolute surprise to me as my son had never expressed any interest in such a vocation before. Needless to say, I was proud as a prize-winning heifer at the Lake County Fair as my son sat me down and told me the story of how it all came about. I listened with an open, receptive mind, filing away every important detail for later use. For a month, my subconscious mind chewed on this information, fueled on by endorphins of pride, then it happened...I had a dream about what it would be like to be a firefighter in the year 2070. When I woke up the next morning I had the main plot and the subplots fully realized, I had the main and secondary characters worked out and named, I had the antagonist and his reasons for being so, completely developed, I had the various action scenes fully visualized. It was like a miracle. All I had to do was sit down and write the book. I quickly filled pages and pages of my journal (which I keep by

my bedside for such an emergency) with the elements of everything I'd dreamt – the book later became "Firefighter 2070: Flashover Point" and it was published by Champagne Books in 2012.

This doesn't just happen, a writer has to train his mind to be open and receptive and only then will such breakthroughs occur, if you're truly skilled at it, on a semi-regular basis. I've had this experience many times.

Another thing a writer does to foster ideas is to talk less but look and listen more. Whenever I'm in a crowd of people, I sit back and watch...I observe people with the concentration of an eagle seeking its prey. Every person is different, unique, every person has their own style of doing everything and I love witnessing this whenever I can. On many occasions I've been accused of being anti-social when in reality, it's completely the opposite. I can't tell you the number of people I've observed or known that have made it into one of my stories (my wife once bought me a T-shirt with the warning: "*Be Careful, You Might End Up In My Novel*" splashed in bold black letters on the front). Sometimes I even bring my journal to the mall, find a bench and watch people for hours. The material a writer gets from doing something like this is priceless but be careful not to look suspicious, apparently, in a little turn of irony, I was being observed by mall security video police and a security guard actually came up to me once and asked me what I was doing.

Something I've found very easy and effective for creating new ideas is the *What If?* technique. I asked myself, *What if a man could fly tornadoes?* The answer was my 2004 novel, "The Funnel Flyer." I asked myself, *What if the Second Coming is actually an attack by an alien strike force?* The answer was my 2015 novel, "Second Coming." The *What If?* technique can be used for any genre of writing. Try it yourself when you've run out of ideas, it'll work beautifully.

I've culled ideas from reading books, watching a science documentary or from listening to a particularly good song (sometimes even the title of a song sets my imagination off). Just be careful you don't steal the main idea, main characters or any lines of text from any of these motivators, this amounts to plagiarism and that isn't a good thing. The idea is to absorb and develop your own original ideas. "Growing Young," a story in my first collection of sci-fi short stories, "Till Heaven and Earth Pass," is about a ship of human colonists and their families who stumble across a white hole in deep space. A white hole is the opposite of a black hole and the crew soon learns that time is going in reverse because of this. How they deal with this conundrum is the crux of the story. "Growing Young" was the result of watching a documentary about the strange wonders of the universe; one of the strange wonders of the universe was a white hole. I took it from there.

A person you can steal from is yourself. A common tool many writers use is to take situations and characters from their own lives. But I strongly encourage you to expand and exaggerate on

these ideas, let your mind fly, have as much fun with them as you want or make them as sad as you want – writers should never put self-imposed limits on their imaginations. That crushes the burst of creativity, it's one of the reasons I've never had writer's block. Once, my wife's son, who was very young at the time, was playing with his Tinker Toy set on his bedroom floor and he came up with this fantastic robot creature. My mind exploded with possibilities when I saw it, the story that resulted, "Ryna," was about an Earth traveler who comes across an enslaved alien robot on some far off, terrible planet ruled by these weird spider-like creatures. Ryna, the robot, and Kerkstra, the earth explorer, become friends and at the end, Kerkstra finally sets Ryna free. It's one of my most favorite short stories but has yet to be published...maybe someday!

Looking back on this article, I guess the theme here is that the most important tool a writer has to develop is to observe and record. If you're not doing these things, you're not going to come up with any creative, original ideas. Remember, inspiration is everywhere, the responsibility a writer has is to recognize it as such, pull them out of their brain and slap them down on the page.

Thanks for your time,
GC Rosenquist