



Musical Notes

FROM DELIA LATHAM

Happy Valentine's Day!

Wasn't it only yesterday that we were bringing in the New Year? Yet here it is midway through February, and everywhere I look there are boxes of chocolates, red hearts and cutesy teddy bears. Hope you all have an exciting Valentine's Day with someone who makes your heart go pitty-patter!

I've had such a good time gathering the contents of this second newsletter—I only hope you'll enjoy reading it half as much!

Staci Stallings has invited us all right into her home for our author Q&A. If you can move after overindulging on her nicely blackened cookies, be sure to take yourself right down to the nearest bookstore and pick up one

of Staci's books—you'll be glad you did.

Bonnie Winters provided the devotional this month—don't miss it! A pastor's wife, Bonnie also has an active ministry of her own, specializing in reaching out to abused women.

Writing Tips were provided by Jill Elizabeth Nelson. Look forward to more contributions from Jill in the next couple of editions.

My own news is two-fold: I have submitted my second novel, *Goldeneyes*, to a publisher and am now in the waiting-on-pins-and-needles stage. If I manage to survive the months of awaiting their decision without pulling out all my hair and losing my

husband, it will be thanks only to all of your prayers!

I'm also excited about my new children's book, *Let's Have School*, even though it's only a simple little Print-on-Demand offering, available through www.lulu.com. Lulu is fast and easy, and I needed a children's book to take with me to an upcoming speaking engagement. There's a preview of the first few pages here: www.lulu.com. Once on the Lulu site, just type my name in the search box.

Feel free to pass on this newsletter to all your friends—let's put a song in all their hearts!

Delia

Devotional Notes

by Bonnie Winters

Growing Together with God

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... (2 Peter 3:18 KJV).

The snow measured about midway up his thigh, as our grandson Jack stood by the back door. He wanted to play, but he could barely move because of his short legs and bulky snowsuit.

Grandpa looked out the door and smiled before going to the closet to retrieve his coat, gloves and boots. Once he was ready, he stepped out the door and began to shovel a path so Jack could go out into the yard to make a snowman. Then he bent to help the small boy roll the large body and head pieces.

For the next hour, the two frolicked in the fluffy white snow as the little boy and grown man created Jack's first snowman.

Grandpa patiently taught him how to shape each piece and put it together. Though the coal eyes and carrot nose were a little lopsided, Grandpa affirmed it was the best snowman ever as the two trooped into the warm kitchen for hot chocolate.

Did you ever stop to think how much it pleases God to be involved in your life? He

doesn't just let you alone during the growth process, waiting until you're mature and perfect before He looks at you and says, "It is good."

Because He loves you, He shows you His ways, exulting in each effort and accomplishment. You are the work of His hands, the very beat of His heart.

Father, thank You for investing so much time and energy in our growth. Help us to put our hands in yours and learn from your patience and love. Amen

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Visit Bonnie's website at www.bonnie winters.com. Be sure to also check out her book, *Daughter of Lot*, on Amazon.com.



Bonnie Winters

Inside this issue:

Author of Note: <i>Staci Stallings</i>	2
Food Notes: <i>Cyndy Salzmann</i>	3
Fun Notes: <i>Word Search</i>	3
Notes on Writing: <i>Jill Elizabeth Nelson</i>	4

Author of Note—*Staci Stallings*



Staci Stallings

Q. My readers want to meet Staci Stallings, the lady next door. Invite them into your den and introduce them to her.

A. Welcome! Please come in. Excuse the mess (there's always a mess in my house!). Oh, don't trip over the toys or the science project. Feel free to move the stuff on the couch to the floor and have a seat.

Yes, that's pretty much my life. Three kids, a husband, and me with a serious writing addiction equals no time to clean or to play Martha Stewart. Don't get me wrong. I love my life, but I am now realistic enough about my limitations that I don't think I have to have the perfect house, spotless everything, with an impeccable supper waiting on the table to be worth something. It took me awhile to get there, but God has a way of bringing out the real you when you give Him the reins of your life. At least He did in my life!

Q. You have several published titles. How long have you been writing, and do you write exclusively for the Christian market? Why or why not?

A. I do write exclusively Christian because frankly I write who I am and what I know. Early on, before they even had Christian romance in the stores, I had to make a choice: Do I write what's marketable or do I write what I know? I literally had a character in a freezing river trying to save a small child after a plane crash, and I was asking the immensely stupid question: "Hmm, can I have this person praying to God to help her out of this or not?" Why did I ask this? Because I'd never read a single book where a character prayed about anything. I clearly remember saying to myself, "Okay, I would pray. Yes, she has to pray. I have to write what I know, otherwise it's not worth it to me to write at all." That's how I became a Christian romance writer.

I now have four in-print Christian titles, and I have three more e-book titles, plus one non-fiction Christian title. All told I have 19 full-length novels. I've been writing Christian romance for 11 years now. It is my escape and my way of capturing the stories God has given me from

dreams and other venues.

Q. How many hours a day do you devote to writing?

A. That's a toss-up. Some days I write for three or four hours. Some whole weeks (months), nothing at all. With the three kids and two businesses, there is no rhyme or reason to my writing schedule. Recently I've been carving out 15 minutes before school, 20 minutes after and whatever time I can spare in between. But with various after school commitments and activities, those don't always happen. There was a time this haphazard schedule would've made me crazy. Now, I put my day's schedule in God's hands and let Him figure it out. When I get to write, great. When I don't, I know He has more important things for me to do. It's a great way to stay sane.

Q. Sorry, but inquiring minds *still* want to know: Where do you get your ideas?

A. From the time I was very young, I would have dreams in which I was in a situation that felt very real. It wasn't so much a dream as being someone else and living that moment of their life. These dreams always fascinated me. When I woke up, I would begin to ask questions and formulate an entire story around the parts I remembered. Then, night after night I would make up more of the story—backward and forward—as I went to sleep. It was like making my own movies in my head.

Shortly after starting my first book, I had just such a dream. I had about 30 seconds to go on. I was in a hotel room.

There was a knock on the door. For some reason I was on crutches. I went to the door, opened it, and standing there was a guy I knew that I knew (although I didn't recognize him from my real life). I was extremely surprised to see him because there was a part of me that believed I would never see him again. And then, I woke up. Bummer!

True to what I'd always done, I started constructing a story around this one moment in time. That ended up being my first full-length novel, *Flight 259*. It is not out yet, but I hope to put it out in the next two or three years.

Many of my stories have a dream basis. Others come from conversations I've

had with friends or are the natural progression from a first book.

In the first book you find out what happened to these two characters, but character three is left in the cold. So the second book follows character three finding love also. That type of thing. I don't plan books. For me, they just happen.

Q. Which of your published novels is your favorite and why?

A. Oh, boy. That's like saying, "Which of your children is your favorite?" They all have a special place for the lessons they've taught me. Of my published novels, there are two that stand out.

Lucky, which is my latest release (you can read the first three chapters of it and *Cowboy* for free at:

<http://www.stacistallings.com/Previews.htm>).

Anyway, *Lucky* was a true gift from God. It taught me so much about letting go and surrendering to a story (and God) even if you don't understand where a character is or why he or she acts a certain way. Writing that book was a real act of faith. It was a "dream book" and came on so suddenly I had no chance to plot anything. I just wrote, and the characters and storyline flowed with no real guidance from me. That was way cool. (Plus, I'm a lot like Kalin. He says he would play for the squirrels if they'd listen. Well, I'd write for the squirrels if they'd read!)

The other title that really changed me was *Dreams by Starlight*. It's out in e-book through my website right now (<http://www.stacistallings.com/bookshelf.htm>) and will be out in print later this year. This book really reflects who I was in high school. The geek, the brain, who is shy and afraid of anyone noticing she's around. And then here she is, thrust into the spotlight of the lead in the school play with the guy everyone fawns over as her co-star. It's really a story about seeing beneath the exterior of people and learning to believe in yourself. I've been told that "this should be required reading for every kid in America." All I know is I was lucky to have it be a part of my life.

I hope everyone has enjoyed their visit to my house. I'd give you a goody-bag to take home with you, but you probably don't like burnt chocolate chip cookies, and I really have to get back to writing! God bless! Staci



Food Notes—Bonus Burger Recipe



Cyndy Salzmann

Cyndy Salzmann © 2002

This quick and easy recipe, excerpted from my book *The Occasional Cook* (Horizon Books, December 2001, ISBN: 0889652104), will yield dinner tonight - and two different meals to sock away in the freezer.

First, prepare this
Basic Ground Beef Mixture

5 lbs. ground beef
1 cup chopped onion
2 T minced garlic
salt and pepper to taste

Brown the beef with the other ingredients. Drain fat. Cool.

Now, here's the fun part. Prepare Popover Pizza for tonight and while it's baking, use the remaining hamburger to whip up a batch of Taster Joes and Taco Soup to stash in the freezer for later.

Popover Pizza

4 cups Basic Ground Beef mixture
2-3 cups spaghetti sauce, w/o meat
1 cup Mozzarella cheese
1 can refrigerated crescent rolls
Parmesan cheese

Mix sauce and beef. Spread in 9x13 pan. Top with cheese, then unrolled

crescent rolls. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese. Bake at 350 about 25 minutes. Enjoy!

Taster Joes

4 cups Basic Ground Beef mixture
3 / 4 cup catsup
3 T mustard
1 T vinegar
2 T brown sugar
1 t Worcestershire sauce
1 bag hamburger buns

Put the hamburger in a 1 gallon freezer bag. Dump in all the rest of ingredients, except buns. Put buns and hamburger mixture in a 2 gallon freezer bag. Label. Freeze.

To prepare and thaw, heat beef mixture, simmer 5-10 minutes. Serve on buns. Enjoy!

Taco Soup

3 cups Basic Ground Beef mixture
1 16 oz can diced tomatoes
1 16 oz can diced tomatoes w/ green chilies
1 package taco seasoning
1 16 oz can kidney beans
1 16 oz can corn
1 T sugar
3-4 cups taco chips
1 cup cheddar cheese

Mix first seven ingredients in a 1 gallon freezer bag. Put cheese in a smaller

freezer bag - and chips in a 1 gallon bag. Put everything in a 2 gallon bag. Label. Freeze.

To prepare: Thaw. Simmer soup for 15-20 minutes. To serve, top soup with chips, cheese and other Taco "fixin's" such as sour cream and salsa. Enjoy!

Visit Cyndy's website:

www.cyndysalzm.com

While you're there, be sure to look in on her blog, *The Packrat Chronicles*. I guarantee you'll go back again and again! Her book, *The Occasional Cook* is available on Amazon.com.

Great Advice from Kids

"Everyone has feelings, except for snakes and principals."

- Donna Maria G., age 9

"Don't eat ladyfingers - even if you know the lady they came from."

- Susannah K., age 6

Doctors automatically know what's wrong with you. They have a sick sense."

- Beau M., age 10

"Moses came down with the Ten Amendments, which were God's *Bill of Wrongs*."

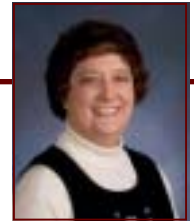
- Susie F., age 7

Fun Notes

R L L E V O N E C N A M O R R
 N O V M K E M G C D D R L P Q
 C R M J O B V S C I G R C V E
 D H Q A R O G O A N Q A A E N
 C R O A N U D M L K R E N C I
 A S C C H T O C N X G B D N T
 N E R N O N I I Q N M Y Y A N
 D K S E D L T C I R M D M I E
 L W E P V A A L L L F D Z B L
 E T S D S O R T J L V E P M A
 L E S I V A L H E A R T S A V
 I N I P D S W E E T H E A R T
 G D K U P J J E S I M O R P K
 H E Q C B O R H T T R A E H R
 T R K P S I L K C I S E V O L

Word List

Ambiance	Heartthrob	Romantic
Candlelight	Hugs	Satin
Candy	Kisses	Silk
Chocolate	Love	Sweetheart
Cupid	Lovers	Teddy Bear
Darling	Lovesick	Tender
Diamond	Mood	Valentine
Embrace	Promise	
Hearts	Romance Novel	



Jill Nelson

Unmuddling the Prologue Puzzle

Writers the world over wrestle with prologues. Some have sworn off them for life. But hold on there a nanosecond! Some stories are better with one than without, and that's the only criteria to consider when deciding whether to write a prologue.

How do you know if your story needs one? Here are several essential factors to consider:

1. Does my prologue portray a pivotal moment crucial to the rest of the story?

While a prologue should "hook" the reader, that cannot be the sole purpose for including one. If your first scene of chapter one is so dull it doesn't contain its own hook, you need to rewrite the scene or start the story in a more compelling place, not tack on a prologue.

2. Is the information in the prologue necessary for reader understanding of character motivation, conflict, or plot that is best known up front rather than worked in later as back story?

The answers to this question will help settle question number one.

3. Can I keep my prologue brief and to the point?

Three to five pages is optimal, though the story may dictate shorter or longer. Shorter is generally better. Finessed properly, brevity usually carries greater emotional punch.

4. Is my prologue separated significantly from the rest of the story in time or point of view?

If your prologue takes place mere moments or even a few hours or days before chapter one begins, you may want to make it the first scene of chapter one rather than a prologue. There are exceptions to this, particularly if your prologue meets all of the above criteria, but involves a point of view character that is different from the rest of the story.

For example, in *Reluctant Runaway*, the second book in my *To Catch a Thief* series, I have a page and a half prologue that takes place mere days before the main body of the story opens. It is written in the point of view of a woman who later goes missing. This is the only time we visit her point of view.

Brandilyn Collins' prologue in Dread Champion makes the reader wonder who is digging in the middle of the night.

True to my series, the rest of the book comes from the POVs of my male and female protagonists. But since my prologue met all the other criteria, it was necessary to set the stage for the story. Plus

it provided a great hook!

5. Does my prologue take place before the main body of the story?

Simply grabbing an exciting moment from a future spot in the story and plugging it in as a prologue takes us back to criteria number one. A prologue must have a higher purpose than merely providing a reader hook. Please note that I didn't say a writer can *never* use a prologue to give readers a preview of what comes later in the story, but you must have a well-considered reason—foreshadowing a plot twist or an intriguing character arc, for instance.

First person stories lend themselves better to "preview prologues," because of the ability to say up front to the reader, "This is what happened. Now let

me show you how I got there." In the hands of a seasoned writer, this type of prologue can be quite effective.

Here are a couple more tips for an effective prologue:

- The tone of the prologue should be true to the rest of the story. Don't write a "dark and stormy night" prologue for a bouncy, chic lit novel.
- Do NOT make your prologue a convenient info-dump. In fact, your prologue should raise more questions than it answers, enticing the reader to plunge onward.

Brandilyn Collins' prologue in *Dread Champion* makes the reader wonder who is digging in the middle of the night? Is he burying something or digging it up? Plus, the snapshot scene leaves the reader spooked—exactly what she's trying to accomplish. Can you see how such a prologue might pull readers into the story?

This brief article hasn't exhausted all the nuances about prologues, but you should now have sufficient information to decide for yourself if a prologue is right for your story.

Reluctant Burglar, Jill Elizabeth Nelson's debut novel of romantic suspense, released in September 2006. Next in the *To Catch a Thief* series, *Reluctant Runaway*, releases in March 2007.

Jill loves the peaceful life in rural Minnesota, where she and her family enjoy camping, hiking and horseback riding. Visit her at www.jillizabethnelson.com for an opportunity to win a signed copy of her latest release.

Watch for a contest with an exciting giveaway prize in the next edition of *Musical Notes* !

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Word Search Solution

