



A note from our president, Gina Nelson

August 2010

There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein. ~ Walter Wellesley "Red" Smith

Every writer I know has trouble writing. ~ Joseph Heller

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Every year at this time, swimmers from North Texas converge on one of our local natatoriums to kick and paddle their extremities off, competing for medals and trophies and team bragging rights. After attending this meet for several years, our family is down to just one competitive swimmer, my strong and graceful sixteen-year-old. Without my three boys to chase I find myself watching from the sidelines with a new perspective.

Yet again, I see myself and the writer's world reflected. This time it shimmers in the smiles, pouts, and frustrated expressions of the competitors. I smile with the younger ones who are so proud to finish, win first in their heat, or make it to the consolation final. I squirm with recognition when grim-mouthed athletes respond to their sympathetic parents with terse words and downcast eyes.

Throughout the years we've repeatedly asked our boys to concentrate not on how they finish, first, second, or eighth place, but on their time. All competitive swim parents do the same. That way, even if they finish sixteenth out of a set of twenty athletes, they can focus on something positive. Did they swim their event with a better time than the last time they competed? Are they making progress?

You guessed it. Progress is exactly what we need to focus on in our writing careers as well. Progress can be measured by our actions. Are we completing manuscripts, entering contests, meeting with agents and editors, and submitting? Perhaps we're already doing those things. Progress can be measured by honing our skills. Are we working to improve our characterizations, descriptions, dialogue, and conflict? Okay, let's say we're doing those things as well. Are we accountable to a critique group? Setting goals, both short and long term?

So many others before me have said the same thing, control what you can control in this business. You have no power over whether or not an agent chooses to represent you or if an editor offers you a contract. You do have power over your writing and progress. This month I want to encourage all of us to recognize our own progress, pat ourselves on the back for how far we've come, and toughen our commitment to improvement. And, of course, enjoy the writing.

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I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter. ~James Michener