



## Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING  
HISTORICAL FICTION

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### From the Editor

On the first Wednesday of each month, I write a [blog post](#) for the Insecure Writer's Support Group. They have a question prompt, which I usually follow. This month's question was: **Has a single photo or work of art ever inspired a story? What was it and did you finish it?** Yes, many photographs and postcards have inspired stories. Some are finished and many more are only partially completed. I got to thinking about the elements that can inspire stories.

- Photographs
- Old diaries or journals
- Overheard conversations
- People
- Past experiences
- ...and the list goes on...

Many of my own ideas for short stories and books have come from people that lived in the past. One such woman is Annie Edson Taylor – the first woman to survive going over Niagara Falls in a barrel – on her 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday nonetheless!

In 2016, I first began dabbling with a YA story with Annie in it. That book never got too far. Now I'm in the midst of a chapter book that visits Annie in 1901. (Still not much progress made in that one either!) I did complete one short story with Annie as the main character. I submitted it to a short story contest in a writing group. (Results to be announced tomorrow.)

This week I'm doing something a little different in the newsletter. I'll share a bit of the historical background of Annie Edson Taylor that I wrote up in 2016. Then I'll share the short story that I submitted to the Dallas Area Writers Group (DAWG) short story contest.

Thinking of how these ideas for storylines come from so many different places – if you're an author and have an unusual way that a story/plot/character germinated, share your story with us and we'll print them in the March 13<sup>th</sup> issue.

Send a little blurb (around 100-300 words) about what inspired this story, plot, or character and what story or book it became. Send me your blurb, a buy link if the book is available for purchase, and one author link where others can find you and friend or follow you. Send it to [texastrishafaye@yahoo.com](mailto:texastrishafaye@yahoo.com) by March 6<sup>th</sup>, and we'll include it in the March 13<sup>th</sup> newsletter.

Happy reading and even happier writing!

*Trisha*

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## Annie Edson Taylor



Annie turned 63 on October 24<sup>th</sup>. She celebrated her birthday in a manner no one ever had before. And no one has since.

No red hat society luncheon. No parties with the grandkids. No drinks with her besties. No cake filled with candles.

It was only her. Her cat. A lucky heart-shaped pillow. A big barrel. And thousands of spectators.

Annie is Annie Edson Taylor, born on October 24, 1838, in Auburn, New York. She celebrated her 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday, in 1901, by being the first person – and the first woman – to survive going over Niagara Falls in a barrel.

She didn't set out to earn her notoriety with this unusual goal. But sometimes paths through life meander into ways we never expect.

Annie was the fourth of eight children born to Merrick and Lucretia Edson. Her father owned a flour mill along the Owasco Lake outlet. Her father died when she was 12, and the money he left behind left the family comfortable and not lacking.

After receiving an honors degree in a four-year training course, Annie became a school teacher. In 1856 she married David Taylor, the brother of her boarding school roommate. But life was far from ordinary after that. They had a son who died within days of his birth in 1857. Then the Civil War swept through our country. Her husband was killed in battle fighting for the Union. At the age of 25, Annie was a widow.

Still having a sizeable inheritance from her father, Annie spent the next years traveling in pursuit of different occupations. She traveled to Texas, then to New York City, the Carolinas, Washington, D.C., and

Indianapolis. Through her travels, she mostly taught dance lessons. By 1889 she'd purchased a house and settled in Bay City, Michigan. She opened a dance school there, spending most of her money opening and supporting the school. It wasn't successful and she had to close the doors. She saw her inheritance dwindling.

Enter the Pan-American Exposition taking place in Buffalo, New York. The Exposition was drawing huge crowds of people, coming to visit the 350 acres of exhibits and fun. Many stopped at Niagara Falls while in the area.



Annie concocted a scheme about going over the falls in a barrel on her birthday. She used a custom made barrel, constructed of oak staves and iron bands, fitted with a leather harness and iron hand-holds and padded with a mattress. A 200-pound anvil ballast weighted the barrel.

A week before her grand even she traveled to New York and began preparations. Two days prior to her own ride over the falls, the feat was tested using a cat. Over Horseshoe Falls it went. The cat and the barrel survived the plunge unharmed.

On her birthday morning, thousands gathered to watch the epic event. The barrel was towed out to the middle. Annie, dressed in a long black coat and broad feathered hat— and her lucky heart-shaped pillow — climbed in. The lid was screwed down. A bicycle tire pump was used to compress the air in the barrel and the hole sealed with a cork.

Off she went. Set adrift south of Goat Island the Niagara River currents carried the bobbing barrel toward the Canadian Horseshoe Falls. After a trip of fewer than twenty minutes, rescuers retrieved the barrel and after some time to open it up, discovered that the birthday girl had survived the trip relatively uninjured, except for a three-inch gash on her head.

Annie later told the press, "If it was with my dying breath, I would caution anyone against attempting the feat...I would sooner walk up to the mouth of a cannon, knowing it was going to blow me to pieces than make another trip over the Fall."

This grand gesture failed to garner the attention and fame that Annie envisioned. Her manager disappeared, taking her barrel with him. She earned some money from speaking engagements, but not enough to see her comfortably into old age. Annie died almost blind and deaf and broke. She died April 29, 1921, at the age of 82 at the Niagara County Infirmary and is buried in "Stunters Section" of Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls, New York.

During her lifetime Annie didn't see her brave adventure gain her the wealth she expected. But over 100 years later, we still celebrate Annie and applaud her for attempting something that I'm certainly not ready to try. When I reach this milestone (not all that far off) I'll attempt a much more sedate celebration. And it won't have any barrels involved!

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## A Lady, a Barrel, and a Plan



She'd either be rich and famous –or she'd be dead. There didn't seem to be any in-between possibilities. Many before Annie had discovered that fooling with the falls was a one-way ticket to eternity. She hoped that with her plan in place, she would end this venture and still be breathing – alive and able to collect the vast fortunes sure to land in her hands.

The idea for this wild scheme germinated three hundred miles away from the treacherous waters that soon dominated Annie's thoughts. Living in a boarding house in Bay City, Michigan, she spent her days bemoaning her dwindling funds and the series of failed business attempts that hadn't brought her the prosperity she coveted. One July afternoon she picked up a New York newspaper and read of Carlisle Graham completing his fifth successful barrel ride through the Whirlpool Rapids of Niagara Falls. The fame and notoriety he received for his feats taunted her and kicked her imagination into overdrive.

The paper also reported that hundreds of thousands of attendees visited the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, which was ending on November 2, 1901. Coupled with the huge tourist attraction of Niagara Falls, she felt that if she could complete a daredevil coup of her own, people would throng towards her, thrusting money into her hands.

But she had to act soon. There were only three months left before winter descended on these northern states and the Exposition closed for good.

I'm a smart, capable woman. I can succeed. I just need to put my thinking cap on and use my noggin. That's got me through many a trial over my years traveling the country. I shall put my mind to good use and come up with a foolproof plan.

Annie paced her small room, her voluminous black skirts swishing with every step. Back and forth she went, her house shoes etching a path in the thick knotted rug that lay beside the bed. There were so many factors to consider.

When? She didn't have much time if she wanted to ensure a huge crowd to view her in action. She chose Sunday, October 20th, the Sunday before her October 24th birthday. That gave her time to prepare. While the weather was more precarious then, there should be a surge of people in the area to view the Exposition before its final days.

The barrel would be a challenge. That part of the plan was critical to its success. Finding a competent cooper to construct a top-quality barrel was first on the agenda.

Wouldn't want a poor, weak barrel that will leave me dashed to bits at the bottom of the falls. I don't trust anyone to design what I need. Don't want an inferior product. I'll come with the dimensions I want.

She also needed a crew that knew Niagara and its currents. Trustworthy, reliable men. Strong men. Men to help launch her and – God willing – retrieve her intact barrel and release her from the wooden transport once she was over the falls and at the bottom.

The next morning, excited about her brainstorm, Annie donned her most auspicious hat, the one with the largest ostrich plume, tucked her reticule on her arm and strode out the door.

One of the other boarders, hidden in an armchair by the common downstairs fireplace called out to Annie. "Where are you off to so bright and early?"

"Just out...for a bit of...shopping." Annie was reluctant to share the details of her newly devised plan. Secrecy seemed to be the best for this venture.

Hours later, returning home with her arms full of a stack of folded cardboard, a ball of twine and the largest needle the mercantile had to offer, Annie wondered how she could slip her supplies in unnoticed. Fortunately, the room was empty and she dashed towards her rented room.

Laying out the cardboard on the floor, Annie started measuring and sketching. By trial and error, with a generous supply of her academic knowledge, she soon had the barrel staves marked out. She cut them out and proceeded to stitch them together with the twine. Testing it out, as if she were truly enclosed in the beast, she deemed her design satisfactory.

Design completed. Check. Fifteen inches at the base. Thirty-two inches in the center. Twenty-four inches at the top. Four and a half feet tall – perfect for my five-foot-four-inch frame. Next step – barrel construction.

Annie started asking people who the best cooper was. She kept hearing the same name – John Rozenski, the proprietor of Bocenchia Cooperage Company in West Bay City.

She was a woman used to forging through life and bending it to fit her will. She marched into the cooper's shop, plans underarm, confident that she'd have the barrel of her design without any trouble.

John Rozeneski did not accommodate her request. "Mein Gott, you will be kilt, and me to help! I cannot do such a thing."

"But I want you to build it. You've been highly recommended. I know you can build the proper barrel I need if you follow my instructions."

He shook his head in refusal. "You must find another cooper to make it. You're set on getting yourself kilt."

Dejected, Annie left without accomplishing her mission. But, no one could ever accuse Annie of not being determined. She returned again. And again.

On the fourth trip, Annie finally convinced Mr. Rozeneski to build her barrel. "Of white Kentucky oak, a half an inch thick," she made sure to insist on. "And well oiled. Each stave." To ensure the barrel was crafted according to her design, Annie returned each day to supervise the construction.

During the building, Mr. Rozeneski protested. "You're too large to fit in that small hole."

"Nonsense! I've calculated the size exactly. I will fit. I've figured out exactly how much air I need to keep me alive until one of my cohorts snares the barrel in the lower river and drags it ashore."

"How can you know such a thing?"

“I’ve studied. I’m quite well versed in physics and all sorts of knowledgeable subjects. I counted the number of respirations per minute. I estimate I’ll be in the barrel an hour before I’m rescued. I’m also firmly convinced a divine providence will ensure my safety. For that reason, I have not fear of death.”

Once the barrel was complete, Annie continued with her plans, secrecy still the mode of operation. Other than Mr. Rozeneski, no one knew of her thoughts. In September, Niagara Falls and more daredevils were news features again. Both women announced they would navigate the whirlpool in a barrel - Martha Wagenfuhrer and Maud Willard. Their manager, Mr. Patterson plastered the news of the ladies upcoming feat far and wide.

Annie saw that she needed a manager to help publicize her grand adventure. After all, if she wanted people thronging the banks to see her survive, ready and willing to hand over money to pave her way to riches, then she needed someone who could help make this happen. She made the rounds of established businesses in Bay City, asking for recommendations. Mr. Frank Russell was the choice of many. He’d gained a reputation for being a successful promoter of carnivals, fairs, and other such exhibitions. Tracking him down wasn’t difficult and after consultation, he agreed to assist in the scheme as Annie’s business manager.

For a few days, Annie fretted about Martha and Maud gaining so much exposure over their planned activity. Although, she didn’t give the matter that much worry. After all, they were merely going through the whirlpool in a barrel – not going completely over the falls like Annie planned on doing. No one, especially not a woman, had gone over the falls in a barrel. Carlisle Graham had talked about it at one point, and although he’d completed his fifth trip through the rapids and the whirlpool, he never did try to flirt with the falls themselves.

The Niagara Falls newspaper later reported on the ladies' escapades. Miss Wagenfuher completed her ride successfully on September 6th, even though she was caught in the treacherous whirlpool longer than expected and was unconscious when they finally retrieved the barrel. Miss Willard was not as lucky. On the following day, September 7th, she set out for the same ride with her little dog as a companion passenger. After being caught in the whirlpool for several hours, the dog survived the voyage. Miss Willard’s reward for the trip was leaving the cask as a corpse.

Neither of these setbacks deterred Annie. If anything, it only fueled her competitive spirit and she became even more entrenched in her plan for fame.

In early October, Mr. Russell appeared in Niagara Falls to start promoting Annie’s planned venture. He displayed her barrel, adorned with ‘Queen of the Mist’ painted on the staves, in the lobby of the Park Hotel and began what he was so accomplished at – promoting.

He also hired a crew of men to help - men who knew the temperament of the Niagara River and could assess the currents and flow. And, men who were adept at bypassing the law enforcement officials who were diligent in trying to prevent the daredevils who courted death in the grand dame Niagara.

The greatest asset Mr. Russell found was a teamster that lived on Buffalo Avenue, Fred Truesdale. He’d fished and hunted on the banks of the upper river for years. Mr. Truesdale had rowed across the river several times previously, to dump barrels overboard in the current that flows over the Horsehoe Fall’s rim, close to the Canadian border, the preferred site of the few that had contemplated this deed.

One of his best suggestions was to do a trial run, sending the barrel over Horseshoe Falls without Annie in it. On Friday, October 18th, Mr. Russell, accompanied by Mr. Truesdale, Captain Richard Carter, and several other helpers towed the barrel near the Canadian shore and released it. The barrel completed its maiden voyage undamaged.

Plans for the stunt proceeded as planned, even though the inclement weather that Sunday morning added its own complications.

Mr. Truesdale was concerned. "The winds are too high. They've churned up the navigable portion of the river. We shouldn't go today."

"We're going today," Annie insisted. "We haven't come this far along to let a little wind throw us off course. We're continuing as planned."

Despite the misgivings of the crew, they all gathered at Port Day's dock at 2 p.m. that Sunday afternoon. Annie removed her outer clothing and slid through the opening at the top of the barrel. They towed her barrel out to the middle of the River, battling with Mother Nature the entire way. Once they were in the spot where they planned to let the barrel go, Mr. Truesdale, holding himself tightly in the buffeting boat, looked around. He didn't let go of the rope. "We're not doing it," he yelled across the forceful wind that battered the crew and the crowds on the shore. "Row us back! I can't doom this woman to certain death."

Disappointed to find that she wasn't going over the falls that afternoon, Annie pouted a bit, even as she realized that the crew they'd hired knew best. "Thursday it is, then! I shall celebrate my birthday this year in a style most uncommon."

Four days later, she was off for a repeat, although with a slight variation of the previous attempt. The crew anticipated police interference with their plan, and as they'd discovered on the previous attempt at Port Day, the swarming crowds, full of suggestions, hindered their project immensely. They agreed that it would be easier to depart from the head of Grass Island instead.

Hopefully this time Annie would land with a successful splash into the water below. Arriving at her destination, Annie was gratified to see a crowd of reporters waiting for her, shouting questions and greetings in her direction. Reporters from The Niagara Falls Gazette and The Cataract Journal were in attendance to report on the momentous occasion.

Peter Nissen, who'd conquered the lower rapids before, called out, "Well, goodbye."

"Make it au revoir. I'll see you again soon."

Annie stepped into a rowboat that already held her barrel. At 2:45 pm they pushed off of the shore. Fred Truesdale and William Holleran rowed her across to Grass Island. Another rowboat followed, manned by Fred's brother Rufus Robinson and Frank Evans, there to render any assistance needed.

The plan was in motion.

Setting foot on the island, Annie shooed the men to the other side of the small island so she could remove her hat, street coat, and heavy outside skirt. Adorned in only a short black skirt, a blue and white shirtwaist, black stockings and tan slippers, she called them back and proceeded to slide into the barrel as she had a few days earlier.

Soon she was in the barrel, seated on the cushions and secured in the special leather harness that secured her in the middle of the barrel as Captain Billy Johnson had advised her to use. The men added large cushions around her and placed one over her head. Placing the manhole cover in place, they sealed the barrel with a wrench.

"I can see daylight coming in on one side," Annie yelled, her voice muffled by the cushions and barrel entrapment. The men tamped a strip of cloth firmly into the slight gap.

Feeling confident that the small area now wouldn't permit any water to enter, she called out. "Go ahead with the pump."

Mr. Holleran grabbed the bicycle pump they had ready, inserted the end in the air hole and began pumping away in earnest. After about five minutes, it became more difficult to pump air into the barrel and the men deemed it full.

It was later than they'd planned, but they were off. At 3:50 pm, the boats pulled out together, joined by a hawser and they towed the barrel towards their destination. They reached the desired spot in the current and cut the rope.

Annie and her barrel bobbed down the river, rushing to the brink of Horseshoe Falls.

The crowd watched with excitement growing. Her progress was tracked by the exclamations yelled out from the observers. "She's coming, she's coming," soon changed to "There she goes!"

The barrel paused for a moment at the edge and then dropped out of sight from those on the upper banks. At 4:23 pm the barrel shot over the brink.

The journey of the one in the barrel was vastly different from the experience of the onlookers.

Strapped inside the barrel, Annie clung to the handgrips fastened inside the barrel. It was here. There was no going back. She was on a journey that no traveler had ever returned from alive.

Annie felt the barrel gliding down the river, a smooth journey at first. About the time she began thinking it wouldn't be so horrible after all, the iron weight attached to the bottom of the barrel caught on something. Instantly the barrel turned upside down, gave a lurch, and plunged to the bottom of the river. She heard the waters rushing around her and heard the iron grinding on the rocks on the bottom.

She was almost frightened, yet strangely, not so. This is it. One way or another. I shall live or I shall die.

With that resignation, the barrel instantly righted and began its ride again towards the falls. She knew she was getting closer as the roar of the falls got louder and louder, sounding like a symphony of continuous thunder cascading around her.

Realizing she was about at the brink, she gripped the handholds tighter, took a deep breath and prepared for her 158-foot plunge to the spewing water below.

Down, down she went, barrel and all. Rolling, tumbling, a mere speck at the mercy of the tremendous power of water surrounding her. She felt as if she were on a spinning monstrosity, being turned as a dasher in a great butter churn.

Would she survive?

Would she be dashed to pieces on the rocks below?

Would she live to see another day?

She didn't know. The thousands that awaited her on the banks below didn't know.

The barrel landed intact. The crowd rushed to the Maid of the Mist landing. The barrel floated into an eddy near a large rock at the base of the falls. Several men were standing on the rock, poised and ready for a rescue attempt. Engineer John Ross of the Maid of the Mist was one of them. As the barrel floated by, he took the long pole he had ready and retrieved the barrel, pulling it closer to the rock.

In a flash, the men grabbed the barrel up onto the rock and removed the manhole cover as quickly as they could. Engineer Ross leaned over and gazed inside.

"The woman is alive!"

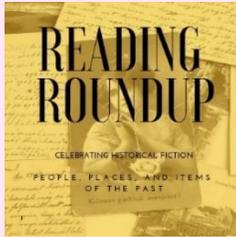
Annie groaned and weakly rose a hand in the air to wave at the thousands awaiting the news.

She was alive. Barely. But she left the barrel under her own volition. She'd looked death in the face. She'd celebrated her birthday in a manner that no one else ever had. However, later, she told people her true thoughts on the subject. "I would sooner walk up the mouth of a cannon, knowing it was going to blow me to pieces than make another trip over the fall."



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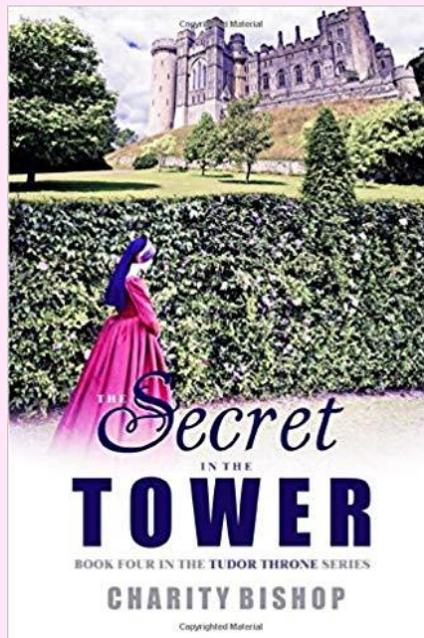
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# The 1700s & Before

## The Secret in the Tower

Charity Bishop



England lies on the brink of war. The Duke of Suffolk has sought protection in the Dutch empire, leaving King Henry desperate to secure his extradition at any cost. Emperor Maximilian drives a hard bargain, which imperils his ability to provide for the newly widowed Katharine of Aragon. He also faces treason in his court, since not everyone has forsaken the queen's treacherous cousin. To appease the Spanish, Henry offers them a castle on the Thames, but there, not is all as it seems. The arrival of his royal comptroller coincides with a rash of thefts. Suspicious and fearful of the king's intentions, the Spanish cling to their last hope, that Katharine can find a way to reforge the broken alliance. But her idea may not meet with the king's approval. When the ambitious young Thomas More brings a stranger into their midst, the turbulent skies over Durham House fill with uncertainty. Secret meetings, shadows in long corridors, and a sinister plot unfold beneath the shadow of The Tower.

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