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- Roadblocks to Our Writing
- Author Spotlight: Sharon Bradshaw

From the Editor



Happy Friday historical fiction lovers! I was looking for a summery image of a vintage postcard to include with this newsletter. This adorable one popped up the carloads of cats heading out for a joy ride in the Catskills. I'm *not* showing it to our cats. I don't want to give them any ideas. Then they'll think that they're in charge of family vacations too. They're already the bosses of the household.

This week we're talking a bit about roadblocks to our writing – some of the things that derail the writing plans that we have in our brain and stop the process midway between brain and fingertips. Then we're off for a lovely chat with Sharon Bradshaw, who has not let any of these roadblocks stop her writing progress. Read on to find out more about her delightful stories.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Jeff Salter, Rebecca Dharlingue, Gail Ward Olmsted, and lots more!

Trisha

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Roadblocks to Our Writing

The following is an excerpt from the workbook I created for one of my four-week classes - The Tales We Tell: Writing Your Family History. It's not specifically related to historical fiction but pertains to writing in general.

As writers, many of us (Some of us? Most of us? A lot of us?), frequently suffer from roadblocks in our writing. Some of the obstacles that stand between us, and our writing are legitimate. Many still work at full time jobs. Families, ageing parents, and young children all exist and need our time, attention, and care. But often, the very things that prevent us from moving forward with our writing are hindrances of our own making or exist because we fail to set boundaries on others and ourselves.

As soon as...

I'm not a writer

Fear of failure

Lack of self-confidence

Too big – it's overwhelming

Gaps in knowledge

Generations of same jobs/same area

Numerous birth/marriage/death

Wrong names, misspelled names, wrong dates

Missing pieces

Procrastination

Lack of structure

The research isn't done

There are so many possible roadblocks that have the potential to bring a screeching halt to the writing world we envision. Some of them keep us mired in the land of "Someday I want to..." and we never even leave that land to begin the project that dwells in our heart. Here are a few things that threaten to keep us stalled and not writing the family stories that we long to.

Lack of time: Lack of time is possibly one of the most common excuses I hear from many writers. Yes, it exists. Time is limited. And when it's taken up by a job, a family, a house that needs cleaned and maintained, it doesn't always leave a lot of writing time. Yet, I've discovered that on the days when I have a large chunk of time that I think I can make some major progress on a project, I end up frittering the afternoon away and I actually get less done than when I have less time available to write.

Can you get up 30 minutes or an hour earlier and use this time for writing? Can you enlist the aid of the family and ask for an hour of uninterrupted time in the evening so you can work on your project? Are there pieces you can take with you to work – notes or an outline you can make on a break, editing you can do while you eat your lunch? Is it possible to set aside one day, or one afternoon a month that you can devote to your family stories?

Not knowing where we're going: I find that I make better progress when I have at least a vague idea of where I'm headed with a story or a project. If I know that in the next scene I want to work on a certain story – or the next chapter will deal with a specific topic – I find that I dive in faster and get more accomplished. You probably won't need every specific detail outlined ahead of time, but at least having a general idea of your next few steps alleviates a lot of the stalling.

Not having all the details we need: Sometimes what bogs down our progress is not having all the details we need. We don't have the pieces, so we avoid starting. Or we're missing pieces and stop writing to go look details up. I find that I accomplish more if I keep writing and use either 'XXX' or '_____' as placeholders where I need to insert a specific detail – be it a date, name, number or other item that I need to look up or research. Then when I'm done with the scene or essay, then I stop and research the items I need to fill in later.

We won't think anyone will want to read what we write: A lack of self-confidence can pervade our souls and keep us from writing if we don't think anyone will want to read what we write. Keep writing anyway. Tell that little devil that's whispering in your ear to go away. Don't worry about whether anyone else will want to read your words or not. Write for you. Write for the desire that fills your heart.

Procrastination: Ugh! I'm certainly not one to lecture about this. I'm not just your run of the mill procrastinator. I'm a Master Procrastinator. I can have a list on my desk of what I want to accomplish that afternoon. And I check Facebook. I check email. I make sure all the cat bowls are filled with crunchies. I double-check the pot of sunflowers out front and make sure they don't need water. I run out to the mailbox – for the third time – to see if the mails run yet. Yes, I can compete in the procrastination marathon with the best of them. But then at the end of the day I still don't have a thing crossed off my list.

For myself, when I find myself starting to fall into this routine, I do best by forcing myself to choose one item on the list at a time. Okay – finish this 'R' blog...then I can go check the mail. Finish the draft of the Chicken Soup essay...then I'll fill up the cat's bowls. Add one scene to the family story...then I'll go take the chicken out of the freezer.

I know there are other tricks that help combat the procrastination bug, but this is what works best for me.

Fear: Fears are very real and can derail our writing faster than anything. We don't think we're good enough. We don't think our stories are exciting. We don't think anyone will like our work. We think we're horrible writers. We think...

There are a bazillion things we're afraid of. (Yes, bazillion is an actual number, and well documented, I'm sure.) But we can't let that stop us. Just keep writing. Acknowledge the fears. They're not imagined. They are real and they are powerful. But try to banish them and jump into the writing water anyway, despite the fears.

Perfectionism: This is another very real problem that can stop our writing before we even get started. And it gets worse when we read something that's written very well. (At least it does for me.) I'll read a piece that is simply wonderful. It's beautiful. It's lyrical. The words move the reader and read like a delightful sonnet. And I think...Oh, I can't write like that! Somehow, we expect that every word is going to flow straight from our hearts and minds to our finger on the keyboard and spill out onto the screen in front of us in absolute perfection. And if it doesn't happen like that...then we're just no good.

Rubbish! Even the best of the writers writes, edits, crosses out, revises again, and polishes. I daresay that even Stephen King edits and changes from what he initially writes. Now, something they write on a second or third draft may be a thousand times better than what I have on draft 100. We're all learning and growing with our writing. I look back at something I wrote five years ago – something that I thought then was nicely done. I'll read it years later and think...Ugh! I wrote that trash?

Don't let these roadblocks stop you or slow you down. In the words of a great many writing gurus...JUST WRITE!

Successful writers are not the ones who write the best sentences. They are the ones who keep writing. They are the ones who discover what is most important and strangest and most pleasurable in themselves, and keep believing in the value of their work, despite the difficulties.

Bonnie Friedman

- www.writerswrite.co.za

There is nothing to writing.

All you do is sit down at a typewriter & bleed.

- Ernest Hemingway



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Author Spotlight: Sharon Bradshaw



Hello Sharon Bradshaw! We're excited to chat with you today about your writing. When I write my historical fiction tales, I venture back to the world around 1900 to the 1940s, occasionally the late 1800s. But your books take readers much further back in time.

Can you tell us a bit about the Monk featured in several of your books?

Thank you, Trisha. I am delighted to be here with you. Durstan's story begins in 794 AD, at the monastery on Iona. He falls in love with Ailan, and she disappears after they celebrate Beltane in the old way. He is shocked and confused when he meets her again, several months later. Beth tries then to obtain the protection of the Christian Church, by manipulating Durstan's emotions, and he is drawn to her. As the story unfolds the characters cross the sea in coracles from Iona to Mull. They walk through the ancient forest to Lord Duncan's Hall inside its timber enclosure. The seasons change from Spring to mid-Winter when the Old Gods are in the magic of the firelight, and the shadows at Yule.

The early Christian Church continues to be challenged by tradition, and the Druids. Charms, amulets, and spells are prevalent. Life at the monastery is harsh, and Durstan is involved in the Viking raids. He doubts his religious beliefs in a society which is dominated by fear of violence; being outcast, or enslaved. Men and women in the 8th century are seeking protection from the most powerful God; Lord, or Abbot. And Durstan's quest? To regain... Ailan's love.

How did the Monk come to live in your mind and make his way onto your pages?

I attended the writers' summer school at Swanwick in the UK, during 2009. I didn't know how to create a story. I had only just started to write, but I was very soon immersed in a different world to the one I was

used to as a lawyer. I had my meals every day with a group of writers who inspired and helped me carry on.

Durstan came to mind at Swanwick, as a young man sitting on a low stone wall gazing out to sea. I learned that I would need to ask him questions to hear his story, and that's what I did. He was watching for the return of the Viking longboats, and which gave me a date for the plot. It soon became clear that I wouldn't be writing the simple love story I had envisaged. His world was in Dark Age Britain, the early medieval period, and a very different time to our own.

The Monk Who Cast A Spell, my debut novel, was published traditionally in 2015. I bought back all the rights to the book when I realised that Durstan was going to become a series, and I now publish my work independently. *A Druid's Magic*, the prequel, is also available on Amazon. I am aiming to release the sequel to *The Monk Who Cast A Spell*, later this year.

Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

I love reading archaeology, and history books. I also try to keep up to date with current research and discoveries on academic websites. I make a list of the books I want to read before I start writing and work my way through them. If I can't find the answers to my questions in the books, then I search online and elsewhere for them.

The main challenge is knowing when to stop. There will always be other stories to tell, and more research to do. Similarly new discoveries which are equally fascinating. Hence the reason why Durstan has turned into a series, and I have partially written spin off books about the Iron Age Druids and early Roman occupation of the British Isles. Both of which are an important part of his history.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

Initially this was in writing about the Vikings, and the violence of the era. I remember thinking at first that this might be too difficult to do. However, another question I asked at the outset was whether the Anglo Saxon Lords who ruled the British Isles were less violent than the Norsemen? This clearly wasn't the case. Many of them were also involved in raiding; looting; enslavement of those they captured, and murder. As Durstan's story developed the Vikings had families, and I was able to tell their side of the tale.

I didn't realise the amount of research I would need to do to be fully immersed in Durstan's world. A time which was in many ways more like Tolkien's Middle Earth than seemed possible at first. But people did use charms, amulets, and spells. Magic was an everyday occurrence. They believed in the existence of dragons; the fae, and otherworldly creatures. The story of Beowulf is a wonderful example of this.

I know you have a few current works in progress that may be published this year or next. Can you give us a little teaser about them and let us know when we can look for them?

The sequel to *The Monk Who Cast A Spell* will be on Amazon by September. It's five years later in Lindisfarne. Durstan and Ailan are married, and have a son, Ruari. However, the course of true love never did run smooth, and this leads to tragedy as the story progresses. The majority of the characters will be back, including the Vikings, and some new ones too!

Early next year I am aiming to release the love story I wrote about a waitress in the 1950s. The beginning of Millie's story was originally featured in my newsletter. After receiving a lot of emails from subscribers asking what happened next, I decided to turn this into a novella.

I write short stories in different genres and have created a Storyteller's Bazaar as the place where I can publish them. Last Christmas this led to the release of my first collection of ghost stories, *The Bookseller's Ghost*, inspired by the writing of MR James and the paranormal.

In relation to a new historical series... I am aiming to publish the first book in the Jonas series late next year, or in 2023. He is an archaeologist, living in London during 1888 at the time of Jack The Ripper. There'll be lots of history in this one about Victorian England, and in this first book when he meets Effie, the poverty of London's East End.

I saw that you have a book of poems published also. Can you tell us about your poetry and how writing poetry weaves in with your historical fiction?

I didn't realise at first that poetry would be an important part of my writing voice. When I wrote my first collection of love poems, *From Now 'til Then*, I was in the process of becoming a full-time author. I still find writing in free verse helps me develop ideas, if I can't work on a novel or story. A few lines of verse will pop up in my notebook to keep me going. I love beautiful words, and phrases. Trying to express emotion and feelings through them, and the challenge of telling a story in fewer words.

Folklore and ancient tradition influence the Faery tales you write. Do you have a favorite that you'd like to tell us about?

My research into Durstan took me further back into his history. What would he have discovered in the tales he listened to around the fire at night? These would presumably have been about the great heroes of the Dark Ages and before; important battles, and those who had already become folk heroes. Like Arthur, who has become my favourite.

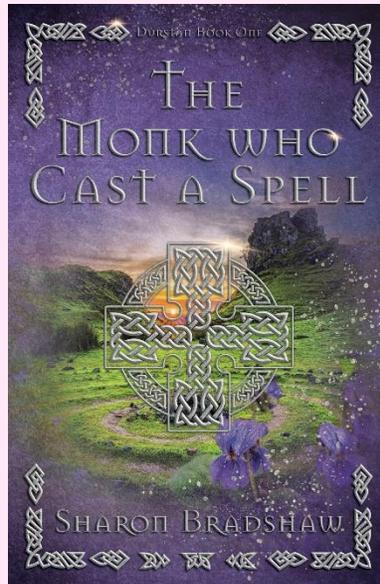
There are many versions of the Arthurian legends, and a choice of who might have been the real King Arthur. My preference is Artuir Mac Aedan, a Pictish aetheling who died fighting to retain his ancestral lands, and was a contemporary of St Columba when he arrived on Iona in 563 AD. I believe that both of them would have been part of Durstan's history, so are in my books.

Is there anything you'd like to share with us that I didn't ask you about?

Only to say thank you very much, Trisha, for hosting me today. It was a pleasure being a guest on your wonderful Pages of the Past.

Also, if anyone would like to subscribe to my quarterly newsletter, you will be very welcome. There's more information about this on my website, and a place to sign up.

Sharon's Website : <https://www.sharonbradshaw.com/>



You can find Sharon Bradshaw's books here:

The Monk Who Cast A Spell : bookgoodies.com/a/B07R4BSMQX

A Druid's Magic : bookgoodies.com/a/B07QMGLNRT

From Now 'til Then, a collection of love poetry : bookgoodies.com/a/B01AZW6AVU

You can find Sharon Bradshaw here:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sharonbradshaw0>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sharonbradshaw0>

BIO: Sharon Bradshaw is a Historical Fiction Author, Storyteller, and Poet. She writes the 8th century Durstan series. A collection of her faerytales, based on folklore and legend, have been published in *The Woodcutter And The Faery Queen*. Eleven haunting tales in *The Bookseller's Ghost*, and her collection of love poetry, are also available now on Amazon.

Subscribers to the Storyteller's newsletter will receive a free short story from her every quarter. Sharon enjoys speaking about her books, and life as an Author. She is also a Ghostwriter, and Editor, living in Warwick near the castle.

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