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From the Editor

Sometimes I giggle when I see ‘prompts’ for writers. Do we need prompts? Not I. I have more than enough ideas. I think I could spend five years just finishing up what I have started, and what I have planned to write, without looking for any new ideas.

Although, there’s one prompt list from John Fox that I didn’t laugh at. There are some great photos in this collection that I’d love to use as a story springboard one day.

<https://thejohnfox.com/2016/06/historical-fiction-writing-prompts-and-ideas/>



But as much as I protest – *no new stories until I finish what I’m working on!* – some ideas still sneak in uninvited. On a visit to my favorite local museum, The Wild Rose Heritage Center, in Keller, Texas, I had the pleasure of seeing a gorgeous crazy quilt made by a local artisan. It’s a contemporary work but based on the vintage crazy quilts of years past. I thought of all the beads, charms, and ribbons that fill my craft drawers at home. Things I’m not using that would be better off in the hands of someone that can use them. So I gathered up a small container of these neglected doodads and passed them along to ‘The Crazy Quilt Lady.’

She sent me a thank you email this week. I almost deleted it. When I saw the beginning ‘Thank you for the fiddlybits...’, I thought – fiddlybits? I didn’t give anyone any fiddlybits. My cursor hovered over the delete button, but then I looked a little closer. Oh! The charms and buttons and beads, oh my. It’s been so long since I’ve been hanging out with quilters, I’d forgotten the term. Fiddlybits. And now a new story idea is rumbling about in this brain. Victorian times. Crazy quilts. A woman and her fiddlybits...

Trisha

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Occupations

A chandler, a fletcher, and a puddler walked into a bar...

Oh, you've heard that one?

When reading or writing historical fiction, we step back into time and back into worlds before us that abound with occupations unknown to us today. A chimney sweep was a real profession, not some mythical made-up occupation solely for use in Mary Poppins.

According to a list compiled by the Wise County Historical Society, a chandler is a "Dealer or trader; one who makes or sells candles; retailer of groceries", a Fletcher is "One who made bows and arrows", and a Puddler is a "Wrought Ironworker."

Your character's occupation may seem insignificant, a mere minor detail that you use to fill in one line on your list of facts. Yet, this tiny scrap of information plays a vital role in shaping the character that you write about. After all, it was an important enough detail that occupations are listed on ship manifests and on census sheets.

Your character's occupation can provide many clues as to the activities that make up their day to day life. The daily life of a man that owned the mercantile store in town would be vastly different from one that worked in a coal mine.

When I was researching Athelstan, Iowa and the 1934 quilt squares, for [Memories on Muslin](#), I found a reprinted newspaper article that mentioned the stores in the early town. At one time Athelstan was a bustling little burg. Never as large as Bedford, the county seat 18-miles away, it still had its share of commerce. Besides the 'gallon' store on the Missouri side, it listed these businesses:

- Charles Merrill, drugstore
- Mr. Winston, drugstore
- Ace Nighswonger, general store
- Hal Brown, general store
- Miles Martin (first postmaster), general store
- W.J.W. & Pearl Townsend, store
- Sid Merriman, store
- Miles Martin (postmaster & general store owner), hotel
- Ed and Avon Johnson, butchers and sausage makers
- Flint and Coats, coopers
- Dr. Childres, first physician
- Schoenmann and Sons, lumber yard

I'd never heard of a cooper and had to look it up. According to Wikipedia, "Traditionally, a cooper is someone who makes wooden staved vessels of a conical form, of greater length than breadth, bound together with hoops and possessing flat ends or heads. Examples of a cooper's work include but are not limited to casks, barrels, buckets, tubs, butter churns, hogsheads, firkins, tierces, rundlets, puncheons, pipes, tuns, butts, pins, and breakers."

Besides the job of cooper, which no longer exists today, many other occupations don't exist anymore. Think switchboard operator, milkman, service station attendant, or iceman are just a few common occupations from not all that long ago that vanished with the changing times.

Many occupations may be familiar to us, even though they're not in existence anymore. A tinker is an itinerant tin pot and pan seller and repairman, a fish monger is a seller of fish, a bard is a poet or minstrel. Many occupations still have the same name today such as a mason is a bricklayer.

Its fun perusing the [London Census 1891 Transcription Blog](#) and reading some of the occupations listed at that time.

- An 'ankle beater' was a young person who helped to drive the cattle to market.
- A banker (not what you'd think) dug ditches to allow drainage, placing the surplus earth in banks.
- A battledore maker made the beaters used on clothes and carpets etc. to remove dust
- A bellowfarmer was a person responsible for the care and maintenance of the church organ.
- A bellows maker made the bellows used for organs or blacksmiths fires.

Just for fun, here are a few websites that mention other occupations that have disappeared, such as a knocker-upper, rat catcher, bowling alley pin setter, or a lector, among others.

What are some of the weird jobs that no longer exist?

<https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-of-the-weird-jobs-that-no-longer-exist>

11 Jobs From 1850 That Are Totally Extinct

<http://www.businessinsider.com/11-jobs-from-1850-that-are-totally-extinct-2013-9>

35 Important Jobs that No Longer Exist – Part 2

<http://www.best10resumewriters.com/35-jobs-no-longer-exist-part-2/>

Old Jobs that No Longer Exist

<https://journal.media/old-jobs-that-no-longer-exist>

10 Common 19th Century Occupations That You're Not Likely to See Today

<https://familyhistorydaily.com/family-history/20-antiquated-occupations-1880-us-census/>

Free Dictionary of Old Occupations and Trades

<https://www.thoughtco.com/dictionary-of-old-occupations-and-trades-1422235>

Old Names of Occupations and Their Meanings

<http://wisevahistoricalsoc.org/2010/09/08/old-names-of-occupations-and-their-meanings-dan-burrows-2/>

London Census 1891 Transcription Blog

<http://www.census1891.com/occupations-a.php>

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Sharon Cathcart is an author I keep seeing all over the place. She's on Facebook in different groups I belong to, writing to monthly prompts from the Insecure Writers Support Group, and blogging in April's A to Z Blog Challenge. You'd think with her active online presence that she wouldn't have time to write. But oh, if you make that assumption, you'd be wrong. Sharon has a full array of short stories and books in varying genres. Historical fiction seems to be her favorite, with many of her tales set in New Orleans. But besides the past, Sharon also has several publications that are memoir, personal growth, and writing advice for the indie author. And writing in multiple genres does not dilute the power of her written word – as her many awards testify. Welcome our spotlighted author for this week – Sharon Cathcart.



Hello, Sharon. It's great to have you as our guest on Pages of the Past this week. Looking at all your books you have, I see that you've been writing for a while. What started you on your writing journey?

Honestly, I've been writing for as long as I can remember. I made up little stories and plays when I was in elementary school, often producing them with classmates. I loved reading, and telling stories was a natural outgrowth of that.

What drew you to write historical fiction?

It's the genre I enjoy reading the most, to be honest. I love reading books where I learn about how people lived and worked, what they ate, and how they behaved. Well-written historical fiction teaches us a lot about the past whilst simultaneously keeping us entertained.

You have a range of eras and genres that you write in – Historical fiction, urban fantasy, interethnic romance, historical paranormal, and more. Do you have a favorite, and what is it that you enjoy most about that genre or era?

It took a long time before I embraced that most of my stories are romances. I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, when most romances were so-called bodice-rippers, with a lot of rape and mayhem. I didn't want to own the romance label because of that, but the genre has changed a lot since then. I like experimenting

with my writing and trying new things to stretch myself. However, the historicals remain a favorite because I love doing research.

I'm an ardent Francophile, so a lot of my books are set in France. I'm particularly fond of the late 19th C., when so many interesting artistic and industrial advances were made, so you see a lot of that in my work.

Many of your books are set in Louisiana and New Orleans in the past. What was it about this area that made it the perfect setting for so many of your stories?

New Orleans is a magical place for me. I don't know anyone who's neutral on it; they either love it or they hate it. My fondness for New Orleans is an outgrowth of being a Francophile, to be honest. It's just as amazing as Paris, in a different way. The French, Spanish, and American cultures that make up New Orleans' past come together in a way that you just don't find anywhere else. We carry culture in three ways: language, food, and music. New Orleans brings all of the historical cultures together in their culture-bearing. Plus, the history is right there for everyone to see, with street signs in French, Spanish, and English, musicians everywhere, and so on.

Can you tell us about one of your favorite characters from one of your books?

Oh, my goodness. I love Gilbert Rochambeau, in the "Seen Through the Phantom's Eyes" series. Gilbert was originally a minor character in the first novel, but he didn't want to be quiet! He let me see that he had a bigger role to play, and the entire series was better for it.

And then there's Amos Boudreaux, in "*Bayou Fire*." I think I was halfway in love with him by the time I finished writing the book. He's a bad boy hunk, but he's also a social reformer. He's smart, sexy, and complex. I really enjoyed creating him.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

I will do research forever if given the opportunity. My first two novels took five years each to write because I would go down all of these delightful rabbit holes of information! Luckily, I attended a lecture by the brilliant historical fiction author C.W. Gortner, who talked about how he has to put a time limit on research (other than double-checking) so that he can actually write things! I took that to heart, and as a result, "*Bayou Fire*" took a year to write.

Do you have a current historical fiction work in progress? Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

My current work in progress is a contemporary called "*Second Chance in the Vieux Carre*." It's about Amos Boudreaux's brother, Harmon, and his challenges navigating romance as a widower.

However, I also have a series called "*Pocketful of Stories*," which are 30-minute reads. The next one, "*Flowers of Europe*," introduces an American inventor named Thaddeus Flowers. We see him in London and Paris in the late 19th C., romancing women and trying to get backing for his airship idea. It's historical fiction with a steampunk edge and will be out in August.

This question doesn't relate to historical fiction at all. But as a cat rescue Mama myself, when I saw your book *Hugs and Hisses: My Mission of Love as a Shelter Volunteer*, I was intrigued. I also saw that all the proceeds from the book benefit the Humane Society Silicon Valley. Can you tell us a little bit about *Hugs and Hisses* (which is a fabulous title, by the way!)?

"Hugs and Hisses" chronicles my training and first year as a cat behaviorist/socializer with Humane Society Silicon Valley. I have been there for almost 9 years now. Anyway, I wrote the book and wound up putting it aside for a long time because it didn't feel like it was quite right. Then, a very special kitty that I adopted from HSSV, Teddy, died unexpectedly of a heart condition and I felt called to look at the manuscript again. I felt like Teddy was sitting on my shoulder when I did the editing, and the timing was right to put the work out into the world. I had the enthusiastic backing of the shelter staff and board, which was huge. I am grateful for every purchase that means more funds go to help the animals.

You can find Sharon E. Cathcart's books here:

All of my titles are either free or discounted through July 31 on Smashwords:

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/fiona64>

Amazon: [https://www.amazon.com/Sharon-E-](https://www.amazon.com/Sharon-E-Cathcart/e/B003NYF6C2?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_8&qid=1562607692&sr=8-8)

[Cathcart/e/B003NYF6C2?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_8&qid=1562607692&sr=8-8](https://www.amazon.com/Sharon-E-Cathcart/e/B003NYF6C2?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_8&qid=1562607692&sr=8-8)

You can find Sharon E. Cathcart here:

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/sharon.e.cathcart>

Blog: <http://sharonecathcart.wordpress.com>

Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/sharonecathcart>

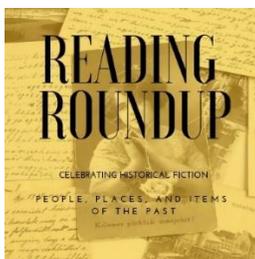
BIO: Sharon E. Cathcart is an award-winning author of fiction featuring atypical characters.

A former journalist and newspaper editor, Sharon has been writing for as long as she can remember and always has at least one work in progress. She lives in the Silicon Valley, California, with her very patient husband and several rescue cats.



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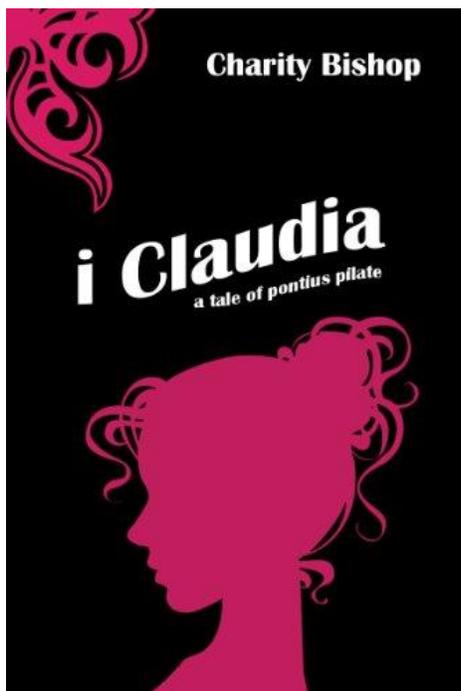
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The 1700s & Before

[I, Claudia](#)

Charity Bishop



The nightmares began in my childhood...

Since then, they have grown stronger. Horrific dreams of blood and death, of dark specters and betrayal haunt me.

Mother wants me to become a seer in the temple of Minerva. I would much rather marry the dashing military commander, Pilate, instead. Every auger that sees me, fears me. They know, as I do, that something is different about me, something I cannot control, and that will haunt me until a Jewish messiah takes my hand in Judea.

Not even he can save me from what lies ahead in Rome, nor, I fear, can he save Pilate from a choice that will change the course of history forever.

My name is Claudia, and this is my story.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at texastrishafaye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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