



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 31, November 1, 2019

In this issue:

- Characterization: Bringing our Ancestors to Life
- Author Spotlight: Xina Marie Uhl
- Reading Roundup: Books from the 1900s/1910s

From the Editor



Happy November! Or, as many of you will acknowledge – Happy NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) where many of us will be aiming to write 50,000 words over the next thirty days. Since 2009, I've participated eight times, and made the 50,000 word goal four times. I have grand plans for this coming month. However, since I just totaled up my word count for October and I see that most months this year so far I've only been writing about 12-14,000 words a month...

Well, it should be an interesting month. But what's the old saying – something like 'Shoot for the stars and even if you don't make it, you may hit the moon?'

Granted, I have to cut myself a little slack. My part-time day job hours have gone up. My better half had a knee replacement this summer. And the time spent editing and formatting my last anthology, *Mothers of Angels 2*, is all time that doesn't produce any countable written words.

How about you? I know several of the readers here are enthusiastic Nano participants. But regardless of whether we take part in an organized writing event, what really matters is that we write. And keep producing those books. Because one thing we all are is readers. And while we have to keep telling the tales that reside in our head, we also enjoy reading the stories and the worlds that other writers create.

Such as those that our featured author, Xina Marie Uhl, create. Keep reading for the fascinating tidbits she shares with us today.

Trisha

texastrishafaye@yahoo.com

Roadblocks to our Writing

The following is an excerpt from a four-week class I gave - The Tales We Tell: Writing Your Family History. It's not specifically related to historical fiction, but pertains to writing in general. With today being November 1st, the first day of NanoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) - the month long writing marathon that many participate in - I'll share this excerpt from the workbook that I used in our class on writing our family history.

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 either 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 mail box – 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...

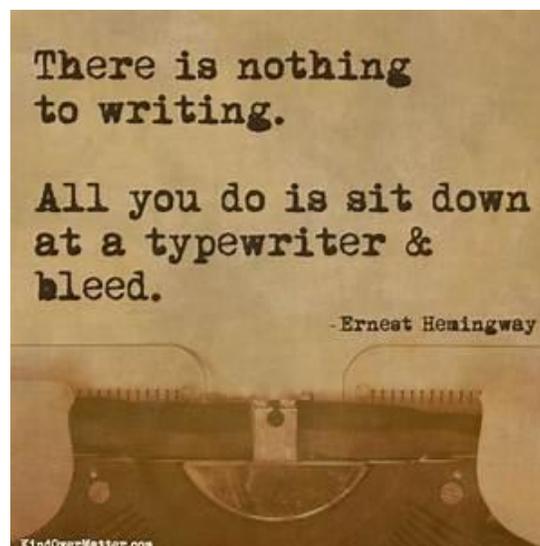
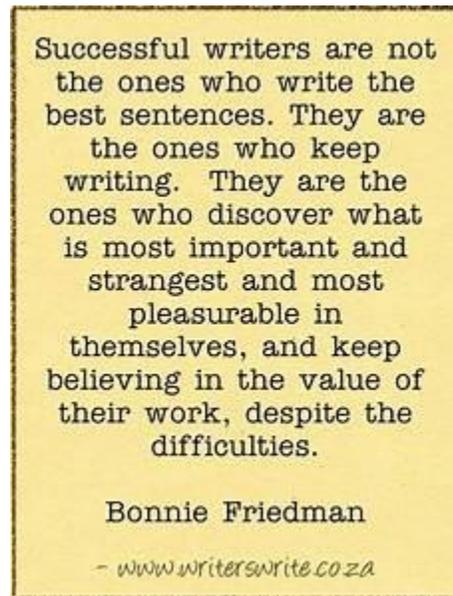
There's a bazillion things we're afraid of. (Yes, bazillion is an actual number, and well documented I'm sure.) But we can't let that stop us. Just keep writing. Acknowledge the fears. They're not imagined. They are real and they are powerful. But try to banish them and jump into the writing water anyway,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



[Get Pages of the Past delivered to your inbox every Friday!](#)

Join us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/184527085517941/>



Some historical fiction authors are extremely knowledgeable about one particular era and write exclusively in that time frame while many tap into worlds over many years. Today Xina Marie Uhl joins us at Pages of the Past. She has fingers dipped in many different eras, from medieval times, to 1900 Antarctica, to the Old West. Come join us as we sit down to chat with Xina and find out about her writing.



Welcome, Xina! You have a wide range of books – your *Icebound Tales*, set in Antarctica in the early 1900s, your newest release, *Lady Law and the Texas DeRangers*, set in Texas in 1892, and some fantasy/medieval books. What drew you to write historical fiction?

Thanks for having me, Trisha!

Historical fiction is a natural fit for me because I have had two warring passions in this life, fiction and history--and historical fiction combines both. I will say, though, it took me a long time to have enough courage and knowledge to dive into historical fiction. My first published novel, *Necropolis*, was inspired by my love of ancient history, in particular, Greek and Roman history, and the setting and design of the fantasy world really reflects that. It wasn't until after I received a master's degree in history, had taught history, and had worked as a freelance historical writer for a number of years that I decided to take on the challenge of writing about real places and times instead of just fantasy places and times.

Since then, I have published two shorter pieces called the *Icebound Tales*, which are humorous romances set in 1900 Antarctica at the British Antarctic base. I had to take some license by establishing the base in 1900, which was before Scott made his tragic voyage to the South Pole. I also had to take license by putting women in the story since women didn't actually work in Antarctica until decades later. Beyond these licenses, though, everything is informed by and based on historical facts like the dangerous conditions, appropriate types of entertainment, and the competition between nations. That doesn't stop the stories from being quirky since they involve elements such as unreputable dog mushers, penguin feces, murder plots, and explosions.

My latest historical piece is my just-debuted novel, *Lady Law and the Texas DeRangers*. While it takes place in roughly the same time period as the Icebound Tales--1892--it is set all the way across the world in West Texas during the Old West. It involves a lady sheriff and the handsome but smarmy rogue who comes to town and causes all manner of trouble. The history was fun to research, but the setting and situations are also heavily influenced by my childhood in Arizona where I roamed around the desert getting stuck by cactuses, outrunning tarantulas, and avoiding heat stroke.

Do you have a favorite era to write in? What do you enjoy most about that era?

Yes and no. I write in a lot of different time periods, including the ancient world and the early medieval world, both of which will appear in upcoming projects. But I have to say that the Old West holds a special place in my heart. Growing up, and as an adult, I have traveled from one end of the west to the other and back again. There's nothing like the big sky, the chasms and mesas, and the long sweep of the land. And don't even get me started on Mexican food, also known as ambrosia.

The thing I enjoy the most about the Old West and any era I write about is the characters. My belief is that if you can't identify with, rage against, laugh at, and fall in love with my characters, then I haven't done my job as a novelist.

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

I love research! It is endlessly fascinating, but also seductive in that it is easy to convince yourself that you're actually making progress on your project when you are really procuring details on 19th century contraception, for instance. While important, some details don't help you get any actual words down.

I've written a number of nonfiction history books for kids, and I find that children's authors are skilled at breaking a lot of complex information down into its fundamentals. Because of that, I like to start my research by reading a simple overview of the time period like you can find in a children's book or an encyclopedia entry.

After that I gather the number of secondary sources and scan them, looking for interesting information as well as entries in the bibliography. Once you do that for a few different books, you'll find that the same sources tend to appear in bibliographies because they are recognized as classics in the field. The classics, of course, provide the best quality information.

Primary sources, or newspaper accounts, letters, photographs, and so on, are also invaluable. They provide a window into the time period that cannot be gleaned from historians who just write about a time from the outside in. Primary sources are from those who actually lived during the time. By immersing yourself in them you can get a real clear sense of the language people used, the environment around them, the technology they used, and so much more.

Your newest book, *Lady Law and the Texas DeRangers*, was just released a few weeks ago. Can you tell us a little bit about it?

I like to describe the book as *Romancing the Stone* meets *Blazing Saddles*. There's adventure, romance, bickering, wild and woolly outlaws, zany chases, cross-eyed mules, and that's not the half of it. It's a fun, fast-paced read designed to take you away from the troubles of the world and leave you with a smile and the satisfaction of reading a tale well told.

While researching the Old West for Lady Law, did you discover anything interesting or unusual?

Apparently, some Old West towns had communal toothbrushes. You're sorry you asked that question now, aren't you?

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

My historical fiction can be described with these terms: character-focused, fun, action-oriented, memorable settings, romantic, and unexpected.

If you'd like to try out my work for free, join my [mailing list](#) for a standalone short story set in the *Lady Law* universe.

About Xina Marie Uhl: Raised in the wilds of Arizona, Xina Marie Uhl obtained a BA and MA in history, with a specialty in the ancient Mediterranean. After teaching college level history classes, she wrote more than thirty nonfiction books for young people.

Uhl's fiction spans genres, including historical, romance, humor, fantasy, and adventure—and locations, including the Roman Empire, Antarctica, and the Old West. Her latest release is a humorous historical romance, *Lady Law and the Texas DeRangers*, from XCPublishing.net. Follow her [reader's list](#) for bonus stories, info about new releases, and special deals.



Lady Law and the Texas DeRangers: <http://xcpublishing.net/lady-law-and-the-texas-derangers/>

Whiter Pastures and All Mouth and No Trousers: <http://xcpublishing.net/whiter-pastures/>

Necropolis: <http://xcpublishing.net/necropolis-by-xina-marie-uhl/>

You can find Xina here:

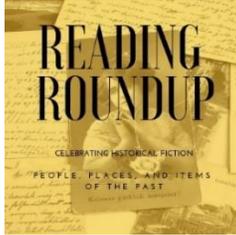
Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/xinamarieuhl>

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

Amazon Author Page: <https://www.amazon.com/Xina-Marie-Uhl/e/B00E7AKNR4>

[Get Pages of the Past delivered to your inbox every Friday!](#)

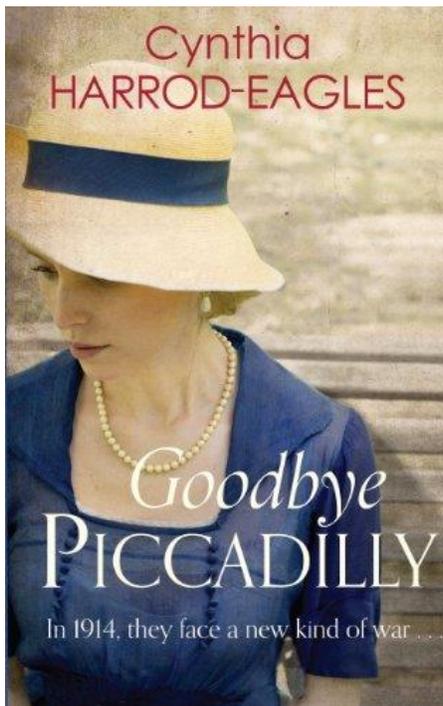
Join us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/184527085517941/>



The 1900s/1910s

[Goodbye Piccadilly](#)

Cynthia Harrod-Eagles



For David, the eldest, war means a chance to do something noble; but enlisting will break his mother's heart. His sister Diana, nineteen and beautiful, longs for marriage. She has her heart set on Charles Wroughton, son of Earl Wroughton, but Charles will never be allowed to marry a banker's daughter. Below stairs, Cook and Ada, the head housemaid, grow more terrified of German invasion with every newspaper atrocity story. Ethel, under housemaid, can't help herself when it comes to men and now soldiers add to the temptation; yet there's more to this flighty girl than meets the eye.

The once-tranquil village of Northcote reels under an influx of khaki volunteers, wounded soldiers and Belgian refugees. The war is becoming more dangerous and everyone must find a way to adapt to this rapidly changing world.

Goodbye Piccadilly is the first book in the ***War at Home*** series by Cynthia Harrod-Eagles, author of the much-loved ***Morland Dynasty*** novels. Set against the real events of 1914, ***Goodbye Piccadilly*** is extraordinary in scope and imagination and is a compelling introduction to the Hunter family.

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.

[Get Pages of the Past delivered to your inbox every Friday!](#)

Join us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/184527085517941/>