

The NaNoWriMo Adventure

50,000 Words in 30 Days: How I did it.

Have you always wanted to try and write a novel? Have you ever wanted the writer's experience of creating a story line with characters taking over the plot? Have you ever had a story nudging, nagging, poking or prodding you to be told? The NaNoWriMo is a vehicle of such transport in which it gives you the ride of your life! It is thrilling as a roller coaster with it twists and turns. Please, do not leave out the highs and lows. The point is— your ticket is 1,667 words a day. The mystery and exhilaration is all yours!



What attracted me to the NaNoWriMo was that the library was going to have a kick off with published writers. The writers were going to give hints and tricks of the trade to help you to succeed. I found out about the NaNoWriMo a few days before November 1st, the start-up date for the contest. I logged onto the net, looked up the web page, and read what they were all about. The NaNoWriMo letters of approach were so delightful in their writing skills and content. The first thing I did in considering the commitment was the math. 50,000 words divided by 30 days equals 1,667 with 10 extra words. Then I reread all the hints and strategies the NaNoWriMo wrote about and looked over the notes and handouts from the library's kick off.

The time factor of writing is the commitment. Can you do it? For me, it was the concrete idea of having no idea if I could or not. I did not know at the time how long it would take me to write one thousand, six hundred sixty seven words a day. Glory be should I write one thousand, six hundred sixty seven words to find out and not have it count in the contest. That is work. I used my pre-time before the start day to figure out how to register and figure out a log-on name that no one else had. I reread the NaNoWriMo hints of preparation on setting up a place to write and figuring out a time that is best suitable for you.

This is the time to understand yourself, your strengths and weakness. Understand how you have handled yourself in positive times and disastrous times. Understand how you, with your life circumstances and personality, are going to handle pacing yourself to win.

For me it was remembering running. When I was young I won the sixth grade class dash for girls (boys competed with boys in another race). Never mind that I was short. Never mind that there was the tall long legged girl sure to win who had in the past years, Nancy. Prior to the race, I did some thinking and a few practices runs with my older sister. The first time she was off and left me behind. By the third time, I had figured out how to power and when.

The school race was on, and the whole class of girls was lined up in the open field. The "CRACK!" of the cap pistol was heard and we were off. It was the experience of when to power and where to direct myself in the crowd of running girls that took me out of the crowd. From the corner of my eye I could see 'long legs Nancy' powering in her stride with the usual pack trying to keep up with her. I didn't have as long a stride, but I knew where and when to head my power.

From my experience with my sister, I knew to lean slightly forward and how to pump my arms and put a kick into my power striding. I had picked up a few of the tricks of the trade. Yes, I won! but, as a tie with "Long legged Nancy".

My next revising runs were later in life. I was not on track team, but would be asked to be in high school and college track races, I did the sprinting. I did the dashes; I did the second or next to the last leg in the relay teams. With this month of writing I was now going to have to pace myself to do miles and miles ... can I do it? Can I do the cross-country run, pacing myself through the unknown charted terrain of my writing mind? Not sure of that, I rehashed, could I be disciplined enough to write daily in my mind. Well, I reasoned, I learned to take a bath every night before going to bed and I remember as a child not always wanting to. I brush my teeth regularly and daily, which is a learned discipline. Yes, I reasoned, I can do this.

My attention turned to a story line. I have had different ideas of stories in my head. There were a few attempts of mine to write a novel. I reasoned, the story is there, I just don't know how to get it on to the paper.

The final pre-consideration for me was did I have the time in the first few days to write to figure out how much time it takes me to write one thousand, six hundred and sixty seven words. These words are for the "stinky first draft" of the novel. This is the first draft to get the story on the paper. The rewrite is after the contest.

Reviewing all the information and rehashing the emotional side of writing, I committed myself to enter the contest. I took the emotion out of the commitment and just thought words per day.

Writing a novel, and reading the NaNoWriMo emails of encouragements was delightful! I had wanted the program to carry me and all I had to do was write my story. It did!

NaNoWriMo warned me of the 2-week slump to all writers. They wrote about it so well, I was looking forward to it! I found out it took me 2 hours to write one thousand, six hundred and sixty-seven words. I found out that I wrote in scenes. If writing the scene did not make my count, I wrote another scene. If writing a scene went over the day count I had to evaluate picking up the next day for carrying it through. On days that I had more than two hours available to me, I went with the flow. If I did not have the time, I just picked up the following day by reading the prior 3 pages. I did word count daily and up graded it on my web site. I made a personal chart on paper of just numbers for word count on track and a column for my actual word count. I did print outs and back ups. I did not sit more than my two hours. I moved around and if I wrote more that day I did so after a good break. Life goes on and one has to live life. The first day that I did not have the time to write took me 3 or 4 days to catch up to my number count. From that day on, I made sure I went over my count per day to have reserve. This reserve was only used when I saw a day coming that I could not write.

I did not write on the NaNoWriMo message board. That would take away from my writing time and I could not figure out how to post it.

Telling you about all the little encouragements the staff of NaNoWriMo emails would take away from your discovery of their writer's voice. They had well delivered timing of what you need as a writer and when you need it.

My reward to my commitment was feeling like a writer in the moment when the story grabs you and it writes itself. You are no longer writing the story. The story has taken the lead and you are there just for the ride! Your chapters, which might have been started out of sequence or in the rough, line themselves up quite nicely without pushing or shoving or cutting in line! You find your scenes are no longer as rough. If a chapter evolves and wants a place, the others politely let it in. Marvelous! Who would not want to show up for a two-hour daily date with excitement that touches your mind, emotions and soul?

Your novel is finished!

I chose to increase my word count the last few days to finish before time. Why? Because I wanted the time to make sure I had enough words and figure out how to post it before the deadline!

Your novel is recorded!

The rewrite to your novel is different. There are programs that you can join with the NaNoWriMo to help you though this. I did not choose to go this rout. For me, I had to do catch up with life as I knew it before delving into the month long commitment. When the story had time to meld, I picked it up and started rereading it and lining up the chapters, checking the plot line, etc. The story read flat. I didn't understand this. The scenes were packed and good. For me, I realized one problem. I didn't have the characters eating! Not one meal! I thought, darn. That's good word count material! Then I thought, crumb, I've got to come up with their eating habits and menu's... This rewrite is going to take longer for me...

Meanwhile, another story is brewing in my mind. I jot down notes, clip articles, research here and there and flip all materials into a labeled banker's box. I call it—Book in a Box.

I now know what being a 'pansky' or 'planner' is.

Barbara K. Gardner