

Do You Dare to NaNo?

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If you are reading this, you have got to be wondering if you are bold enough, crazy enough, and silly enough to try. I say if you are even entertaining thoughts of entering then you are. I didn't win NaNo until my fourth try, but each time I tried and failed miserably I still learned something about myself and my writing style. The kind of stuff you can't learn from a book or in a classroom.

I learned I can write really steamy sex scenes and I discovered whenever I faced a plot twist and was unsure of how I wanted the plot to thicken I would just write another sex scene. By the time I was done with that the back of my mind had decided how to proceed and on with the story I would go. You might not discover that particular trait about yourself, but I guarantee you will learn something.



The first three times I tried, I followed all of the formulas out there for writing a novel. I spent the week before each attempt, researching places and things I thought were interesting enough to be included in my great work. I filled notebooks with jotted down facts.

I would break out my collection of possible character names that I had gathered throughout the year. Pieces of scratch paper scribbled with possible quirky traits and character histories would litter the floor of my apartment. Lucky for me I live alone.

My favorite thing was to get a piece of poster board and my crayons and not being an artist, scratch out stick figures and map them around the backdrop of my novel. Then I would proudly display it on my refrigerator. If anyone asked what it was, I would announce my impending participation in NaNo and then if I could get them to listen, I would go on in great detail about the plot.

Yes that is a three legged dog, his name is Salsa, and it's really funny how he got the name and I would continue in great length while people's eyes would roll. The only people who actually get NaNo are those that have at least taken a shot at it.

I think that the reason I didn't win before was the story was already planned out in my head. No bumps in the road, and no surprises. My first attempts had nowhere to go, except the direction I had so carefully planned out. Dismal failures, all of these first attempts, and woefully short of the 50,000 word mark.

In 2009, the year I won, I had done no research, had no notes, no names, and had drawn no

stick figures. I didn't even start until the afternoon of the first day. Being a morning person, this behavior in itself, was highly suspect and I took it as a bad omen.

But I just sat down, turned off the football game, and before I knew it I was swept into my storyline and even I couldn't wait to see what was going to happen next. Since the novel I won with never had any clear intention or design, I was able to keep up that sense of wonderment throughout the entire month. It was an incredible journey.

I actually ended up finishing two days early and wrote 51,397 words. When I realized I was one word away from passing the 50,000 word mark, I was starting the last scene, so I exceeded my goal. Finally after trying and not making it, to win was an amazing feeling, which still lingers.

If you are going to participate here are a few things, I highly recommend. First make sure your house is clean, there won't be any time for that, once you start. Tell everyone in your tribe what you are doing, as this will confirm what they already know about you, mainly that you are in fact crazy. You may very well be crazy, but you are also amazingly brave and I wish you the best of luck.

If you don't win, then I advise you to do what I do when I don't win, I brood over it all year and oh yeah, I collect names.

Teresa Napp
Author of *The Return*