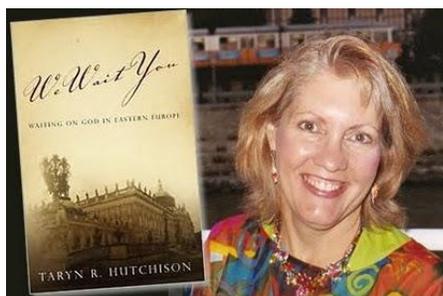




MEET TARYN R. HUTCHISON



Author and Blog host: November 3-December 15.

We Wait You: Waiting on God in Eastern Europe, by Taryn R. Hutchison

WOTH WRITER'S BLOG

Women serving cross-culturally have a unique take on events and a distinct point of view that needs to be told. We want you to start telling (and writing) your stories. Each Tuesday we will have a new post that will inspire and encourage you to value your voice.

The goal is not for you to write an article or a book (that would be great!); we want you to start writing down what you are living, thinking and feeling as you go about your global life.

Join in the conversation. Gain insight and help from published women eager to share their writing expertise with you. It doesn't get any better than that!

--Cindy Blomquist, Editor

Women of the Harvest online *Magazine*

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2009

Writing Your Story--Taryn Hutchison

Start with Journaling

Everyone has a story. Some stories may be more exciting than others; some storytellers more captivating. But all of us living in cultures other than our own have tales that will make people laugh or cry or be inspired. Every person's story counts. In sharing The Story with others, haven't you found that people who don't seem very interested still want to hear your personal experiences? That's because your life experiences matter. God authored the script of your life and He intricately weaves each thread together. You can give voice to His ways, drawing people so they will want to hear (or read) more about Him.

God did more than craft your story. In one of my favorite books, *The Sacred Romance*, Curtis and Eldredge write, "Our lives are not a random series of events; they tell a story that has meaning. . . . Our story is written by God who is more than the Author; He is the romantic lead in our personal dramas." It took me 18 months to turn my personal drama into a book. But it took 15 years to live the story and 15 years to write it, every day in my journal.

For me, journaling was the way I ended each day during the decade I served in Eastern Europe. It helped me stay sane. Recapping how I saw God in the little details (and the magnificent) eased me to sleep with a grateful heart. Even on difficult days, I could see glimpses of His edges and whispers of His ways. I wanted to be able to look back and recount how He comforted me or answered prayer or touched peoples' lives. I didn't trust my memory, although sometimes the act of recording the details helped me recall them.

Before I moved overseas, my journaling was sporadic, tracing highlights once or twice a semester, summing up. But I knew life in Romania in 1990 would be drastically different than anything I'd ever experienced, and I wanted a fresh daily documentation. I even copied dialogue word-for-word to forever capture the voices in my memory.

I never kept a journal thinking I would publish a book. I wrote it for me.

It was my way to talk to God about my days, my love letter to Him. Years later, when I pulled out my dusty volumes to write my book, some days I could only read through a few pages because the emotions I re-lived were so raw. Often I could only cry and thank God all over again.

Isn't that the point of journaling anyway? We're told all throughout the Old Testament to remember and give thanks. Journaling helps us to remember. When we look back, we see God's fingerprints on our lives and we can't help but be thankful. And that pleases God.

What About You?

Share your journaling experiences with us. How do you do it? Notebook and pen, laptop, video camera? Where? Quiet corner of your flat, noisy cafe, train or plane? (I must retreat with a blank book and mug of coffee to someplace quiet, with a view of a tree or a branch or something pretty.) How often? What themes have emerged? What have you learned from the experience?

A Challenge:

Write in your journal every day this week - whether it's the first time or your habit is well-formed, whether you write a little or a lot. Then tell us how it goes.

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 18 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2009

On Living and Examining-Taryn Hutchison

Write What Should Not be Forgotten

We've all heard this famous quote by Socrates, maybe even used it in messages: "The unexamined life is not worth living." Robert McKee, in his book about screenwriting called *Story*, has a new twist that I love. "The un-lived life is not worth examining."

The un-lived life. Is your life un-lived? Do you ever feel like a powerless spectator, passively

watching your days unfold, not wholeheartedly present? It's time to step out of the sidelines and truly live the storyline God wrote just for you. Enjoy it, taste it, experience all of it - the joys and the sorrows. Take time to reflect on it and record it in your journal.

My husband and I are moving in 13 days. Right now, for me to live my life means taking time out – away from the busyness and the people – to feel the sadness. I won't allow myself to gloss over it.

Writers can't be reclusive. You must experience life and look it squarely in the face in order to write about it. According to writer Cyril Connolly, "Better to write for yourself and have no public, than to write for the public and have no self."

However you do it best, be sure to live your life and examine it. And please, don't use the tired excuse that you're an extrovert. Even extroverts need to pull away to think and evaluate and meditate. In Psalm 139:23 David said, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts."

In no time, I'll bet you will find something worth sharing. After all, the God of the Universe is at work in your life. How can there *not* be a story begging to be told? A story that will help someone else, causing them to know that another has traveled their way before and *made it*. A story with words that will give hope and courage, strengthen their faith, hearten them, make them laugh, release pent-up tears to cleanse and heal.

This week, the world will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Berlin Wall being torn down. I get goose bumps remembering how I felt at that time. One miraculous act of God after another occurred that fall of 1989, as Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and finally, Romania shook off their oppressive regimes.

I decided to write my book because someone needed to record what life was like in those lands emerging from the shadow of the Iron Curtain. I believed that God's amazing deeds at that time in history should not be forgotten. My dream was to encourage women like you, women who can relate because you're doing the same work I did then. I hoped to make you laugh and cry and marvel *and* to strengthen your faith so you wouldn't give up, so you'd know your life and your

ministry matter.

Whether your journal is for you or for the world, consider the words of Chilean novelist Isabel Allende: "Write what should not be forgotten..."

What About You?

Have you ever felt like a spectator to your own life? How can you live it more fully? Tell us how you examine your life. How frequently do you take time to reflect? Where do you go to do this?

A Challenge:

Think of a life experience you've had that should not be forgotten. Sketch it out in writing. Over the next few weeks, we'll fine-tune those rough drafts and share them with each other at a later date. How about a contest to vote on our favorites in a month or so?

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 6 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2009

Writing to Tell -Taryn Hutchison

Sharing Your Story with Others

Let's face it. You won't all write books or articles or even want to seek publication. Some of you may think a writer's blog has nothing to do with where you are in life. But I know that every one of you has a story to tell. I mean, what are missionaries if not communicators? Every day, you communicate, with words and with deeds, describing a Friend to others who don't know Him yet. You write to your ministry partners, painting pictures with your words of life in another land. You inspire people with glimpses, both small and great, of God's fingerprints.

"God created man because he loves stories," wrote Elie Wiesel, Nobel prizewinner and Romanian-born Holocaust survivor. While that may not be theologically sound, I like thinking that God loves our stories.

So far, we've talked about writing for ourselves. Journals are just for you, a way to process and bring clarity out of confusion. Today we'll talk about sharing your stories with others so you can help them process. Your voice is unique. No one has had the exact experiences you have had. Just think, your story can help someone in a way that no one else's story can.

When God comforts you in a profound way and you share it, He takes that and uses it to comfort others. Your role is to interpret how you've seen God at work so others will be encouraged and He will be glorified. Novelist Marcel Proust wrote, "The duty and the task of a writer are those of an interpreter."

Every time you're on home leave, you're asked to share your stories out loud with people. That's wonderful. The problem is that sometimes they forget, or they get lost in the details, or they're distracted and they only catch part of it. I used to tell people all about Romania, and then for Q&A, they'd ask about Russia! When your story is written down, it's permanent. It can be read and re-read. The act of writing helps you organize your thoughts and stay on track as you speak, whether you refer to your notes or not, whether the group is small or large. As you practice, it becomes a ready tool in your arsenal to pull out whenever the need arises.

Have you noticed how people often use highfalutin words when they speak in church? When you write out your story, imagine yourself speaking to one specific person who'll be in the audience. Write it with the words you would use to tell it. Make it sound natural, not stilted, as though you're talking with a friend over a cup of coffee.

Last year, when my book was under production, I told a story in my theology class about how God used my friend Bobby's death in my life and it touched people so deeply, I was asked to share it in church. Days before the service, I ran into a church friend at a café who asked me to tell her the story. She encouraged me that we may each have just one life story and suggested that Bobby's tale could be that story for me. This chance encounter occurred the day before the corrections to my final typeset copy were due. I thought, this may be my only book and it should include my one story. I found a place to insert the abbreviated version of the story just in time, in God's perfect timing.

Do you have a story which touches people? Makes them laugh? Causes them to “get” it? Whether it’s your one life story or not, it’s a story which God loves and He can use for His glory.

A Challenge:

List three stories from your whole life that you love to tell. Then think of three stories from your present ministry.

Choose one of the stories you listed. Imagine yourself telling this story to a friend. Write it out as you would say it. If you have any questions during the writing process, please post your questions!

A Contest:

The week of December 8-14, send a 300-500 word story from your life to editor@womenoftheharvest.com. Cindy Blomquist (WOTH Editor) and I will read them and declare the first literary winner from the WOTH Writer’s Blog. The prize will be a \$20 iTunes gift card (just in time for Christmas) and a spot in the March/April issue of the WOTH onlineMagazine!

[Editor’s note: Who knows what will happen with the rest!]

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 2 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2009

Writing as a Calling-Taryn Hutchison

Why Do You Write?

Most writers write for sheer love of the craft. They love writing enough to offset the setbacks, the rejections, the delays. As believers, we have another reason, a bigger reason, to write: because God calls us. Writing can be a ministry.

When I returned to the States, God rekindled my childhood dream of writing. I knew I had much to say about all I had seen God do in Eastern Europe. But I had to defer my dream once more while I went through my season of transition, already large with culture shock and magnified by getting married and leaving my mission organization. I found work as an administrative assistant, a routine job where I wasn't recognized for what I could offer. (Can you relate? Any moms reading this?) After 21 years of discipling many people, I was only able to influence a few, and only informally. God still tugged at my heart to write, but I just couldn't sit at a computer at night after doing that all day long. That's when my dear husband suggested we rearrange things so I could follow God's call. I cut my hours at work, giving me one day each week set aside for writing.

Through writing, God increased my circle of influence to include people all over the world, people I've never met, people like you. I still miss the face-to-face time, but I'm able to quietly write at home and encourage others through life experiences God's given me. I no longer feel marginalized. When I read comments from people who've been touched by my words, my joy and fulfillment overflow. I'm doing what God wants me to do and what He put on my heart when I was a child. It's a dream come true!

I started seriously writing during a time of change, and I've been writing this blog during another transition. By the time this is posted, my husband and I will have said good-bye to our life in California, and started our cross-country road trip to greet the next chapter in North Carolina. This blog has helped me cope because I have hope that my words are helping you.

Writing is about the reader. It's not about you. The ministry of writing is about God using your words to touch other peoples' lives. You have to constantly ask yourself what the reader will take away, what the universal is and how it will help them. Sometimes the benefit is simply that it makes them laugh or it provides a diversion by letting them enter into someone else's life and story for a short while. Sometimes it's more inspirational and profound.

Consider Frederick Buechner's advice about discerning God's call: "What can we do that makes us the gladdest, what can we do that leaves us with the strongest sense of sailing true north and of peace, which is much of what gladness is? Is it making things with our hands out of wood or stone or paint or canvas? Or is it making something we hope like truth out of words? Or is it

making people laugh or weep in a way that cleanses their spirit? I believe that if it is a thing that makes us truly glad, then it is a good thing and it is our thing and it is the calling voice that we were made to answer with our lives The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”

Happy Thanksgiving, dear friends!! I do hope you are able to find your turkeys and re-create our distinctly American holiday in your new home with your new friends.

What About You?

Is God calling you to write and why? What steps will you take to make that dream a reality?

How's it going with choosing a story from your life? This week, trim your story. Think of it as a turkey and hack away the fat. Make it more concise. Write it as you would for your newsletter.

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 2 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2009

Divine Inspiration or Just Plain Hard Work?-Taryn Hutchison

How Do You Write?

I always carry a notepad with me in case God inspires me with an idea or a way to turn a phrase. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and scribble away. While those moments of divine inspiration seem to be the exception, it's so confirming when you sense the whisper of the Holy Spirit, when a “yes, that's it!” resonates deep in your soul.

The norm, however, seems to be making yourself sit at your computer, putting your hands on the keyboard, and typing.

James Lee Burke's novel, *The Lost Get-Back Boogie*, was rejected 111 times over a period of nine years, then published by Louisiana State University press and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He wrote, “Don't give up. I don't think any other advice works. Writing is one of those things where you just have to do it. There will be far more people to discourage you than to encourage you.

The time never comes to you, the inspiration doesn't come to you. You just sit down and do it."

My writing instructor told me she doesn't believe in writer's block. Like any profession, there are days you don't feel like doing it, days you wish you didn't have to go to work. But like those other jobs, you make yourself get out of bed and get dressed and go out there. Sometimes you find that when you start going through the motions, the desire comes later.

For me, almost every week during my one day to write, our landlady called in the construction workers or gardeners. I had to try to write to the head-throbbing sounds of power tools or leaf blowers. Some days, turning up the music wasn't enough and I had to leave to take a brisk walk and some Advil (and pray) before I could focus.

My advice to you is this: Write without fear. Don't think about editing until later. Just let the words and emotions flow. To write you must read. A lot. Learn as much as you can about writing. Hone the craft of writing, whether it's through books about writing, online workshops, or writers' conference. Start small with articles, short stories, or blogs. Get feedback from readers who will help you discern whether God has truly gifted you or whether you should just write for yourself. They'll also help your skin become tougher.

But don't let your heart get tough in the process. You need to keep it soft so your writing will speak to someone else's heart.

Encouragement from the Experts to Keep Going:

"Inspiration is wonderful when it happens, but the writer must develop an approach for the rest of the time...The wait is simply too long." **Leonard S. Bernstein**

"Treat it as a job – not a mystical calling. Then you'll get up every morning and 'go to work' instead of waiting for the muse to attend you." **Jean Brody**

"Write even when you don't want to, don't much like what you are writing, and aren't writing particularly well." **Agatha Christie**

"Whether or not you write well, write bravely." **Bill Stout**

"You only learn to be a better writer by actually writing." **Doris Lessing**

"The writer's duty is to keep on writing..." **William Styron**

"You must write every single day of your life...You must lurk in libraries and climb the stacks like ladders to sniff books like perfumes and wear books like hats upon your crazy heads....may you be in love every day for the next 20,000 days. And out of that love, remake a world." **Ray Bradbury**

What About You?

Do you write mostly out of inspiration or perspiration? Do you have any tips for the rest of us?

Ask God to inspire you while you keep plugging away on the story you chose from your life.

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 4 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2009

It's All in the Details-Taryn Hutchison

Polishing Your Story

Last week, I advised you to write without editing. Today it's time to edit. No one ever writes a first draft fit for print. Everyone needs to self-edit, to tighten their words so they sparkle.

In my 21 years of mission work, our printed newsletters could only be one sheet of paper, occasionally front and back of that one sheet. We had to have a theme and be concise, telling one main story. Today, I get free-flowing and never-ending email updates from friends of the harvest. It's too much. When you take time to trim your material, you'll find it has more impact and is more readable. After all, what's the point of writing if it's not read?

Whole books are devoted to the topic of self-editing. I'll try to distill a few tips for you that helped me:

1. Organize your material.

Make sure you have a theme that comes across. Each story (or chapter) needs a beginning, middle, and end. Unanswered questions or unresolved tension will keep people reading.

2. Show, don't tell.

Rather than give a long narrative explanation (telling), let the reader enter the story and see for herself (showing). Example: Don't explain that someone was angry. "He slammed the door" gets the point across.

3. Limit adverbs and adjectives by using strong verbs and nouns.

Change "Susie walked very slowly" to "Susie plodded" (or sauntered, ambled, or strolled). Instead of "the cute, small house" use "the bungalow" or "the cottage."

4. Read your writing out loud.

That way, you can hear the rhythm, catch things to fix (such as the same word used repetitively), make sure it flows.

5. Less is always better.

I'm applying this principle now as I hang pictures and organize things in our new house. (Yes, we made it to North Carolina after spending Thanksgiving week driving cross-country!) I'm editing our belongings.

It's painful to bury treasures in the closet, and it's painful to delete your darling words. Maybe I should have put more time into editing this blog instead of our knick-knacks. I admit. I'm learning, too.

It's a lifelong process to polish your words and make them shine.

Encouragement from the Pros to Polish Your Story:

"Use the right word and not its second cousin." **Mark Twain**

"Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style."

Matthew Arnold

"Omit needless words." *Rule 17 of The Elements of Style* **William Strunk, Jr. & E.B. White**

"The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. There's not much to be said about the period except that most writers don't reach it soon enough." **William Zinsser**

"The business of the novelist is not to relate great events, but to make small ones interesting."

Arthur Schopenhauer

"Caress the detail, the divine detail." **Vladimir Nabokov**

"Details make stories human, and the more human a story can be, the better." **Ernest**

Hemingway

"Revise and revise and revise - the best thought will come after the printer has snatched away the copy." **Michael Morahan**

Don' Forget! Send in your stories this week! The contest ends December 14th. . . see the sidebar for details. Value your voice and your story...we sure do!

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 12:00 AM 2 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2009

To Publish or Not to Publish -Taryn Hutchison

Putting Your Story Out There

My week-long mentoring clinic was over. I hiked down to the bottom of the canyon to a crudely-constructed prayer chapel. My emotions rushed at me. My completed manuscript had been exposed and critiqued all week. My instructor encouraged me to go for it and take the next step. One fellow student suggested I make a couple copies at Kinko's and be done with it; her words still stung. Another challenged me that my story can't encourage others if I keep it in a drawer (or a computer file).

That day, I admitted to God that I was afraid. If I put my story out there, I'd face many more tumultuous weeks like this one. I sensed Him nudging me forward. I was willing to risk it if I could be certain that's what He wanted. I knelt beside the bench with my hands outstretched. "God, my hands are open. I'm giving this book back to You. Take my meager offering and do whatever You want with it. I wrote it so You could use it for Your glory, so people around the world could read it and know how truly awesome You are. That's my prayer. But it's Your story, not mine."

The big question many of you are facing is: to publish or not to publish. You have a unique voice and a story that is valuable for the Kingdom. Hopefully I've helped you to perfect your already-great story and make it shine. But is it a story to be told or written informally, or is it one for the world at large?

How do you know if it's the right time, and the right story, to seek publication? Mark Twain's advice makes me laugh: "Write without pay until somebody offers to pay."

I'll be honest. The traditional route (royalty publishing) is long and arduous. You cannot submit anything which is unsolicited. To get an editor to solicit your material, you must meet them in person (how do you do that overseas?) and convince them in a one-minute pitch. Next, send a perfectly-formatted query, then proposal, chapter summary, and manuscript. The editor must sell your idea to a committee. If anyone of them thinks it isn't marketable, they nix the deal. One editor had my manuscript for eight months before writing me a (very encouraging) rejection

letter.

When you exhaust every royalty publishing lead, subsidy (self) publishing becomes more attractive. There's a full gamut of options; some are free and carry no clout. With the more reputable ones, you pay the publication costs but you retain the rights and the profits (if there are any). Think of it as a ministry expense.

You must decide. Ask yourself why you wrote your story. Think about the benefit to the reader. Do you have a universal truth? Even though I penned my book with women like you, women in the harvest, in mind, I had to intentionally write my book to relate to a larger audience. The setting of my story is my life in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, but the story is for all times and places. The story is about God's ability to provide.

Putting your story out there is a scary place to be. Your book is your baby. It's part of you. You created it. I want everyone to love my beautiful and intelligent baby. My story is so personal that I felt like I'd been stripped bare and exposed before the world. I had to be real; you can't truly help others unless you are. Much worse than negative comments, I had to learn to deal with silence. I took it personally. I worked at a seminary filled with learned people and I internalized their silence as condescension for my lightweight story.

But then comments on my blog and website started pouring in from people all around the world who were touched by my book. Many came from people on the harvest field (women and men who I'd never met), but several came from people who've never even traveled abroad. I treasure their words, copying them and keeping in a big binder. These readers are the reason I made myself vulnerable and overcame my fear. They make it all worth it.

This post is the last in my series on Writing Your Story. Next week, we'll announce the short-story contest winner. Until then, I hope you are having a wonderful and blessed Christmas season. God bless you as you retell the story He's written just for you.

POSTED BY WOMEN OF THE HARVEST BLOGS AT 10:25 PM 1 COMMENTS