

Write what you want to know
By Janette Kenny

I have a vivid dream as a young child of running across our back lawn toward the bank that dropped off sharply into the pasture. When I would reach the edge, I'd leap into the air. There was always that heart stopping moment where my body would nosedive before I'd catch an air current and rise into a clear sky. I'd glide out over the green grass where cows and horses grazed, and around and above the trees.

The feeling of being way up there looking down was so exhilarating. I'd soar around our farm and those places I wasn't supposed to go hiking but did anyway—like the dense woods that stretched on and on, or the crystalline lake that always felt so cold to my bare feet.

I saw the things that I knew from a different perspective. Afterward, when I came down to earth I felt so worldly. I'd done something my parents couldn't do, even though when I was free to fly anywhere, I'd never go beyond the small world I knew.

Of course, the sad reality of this all is I really can't fly like a sparrow, much less like an eagle. But even back then my imagination knew how to take flight.

'What if' has always been a favorite game of mine, taking root sometime after I grew bored with the sameness of my flying dream. What I didn't know or comprehend, I made up. It didn't matter to me if what I envisioned was possible or even remotely rational—I'd catch that fresh wave of an idea and soar off on a new adventure.

Once I learned how to read, my small world took a quantum leap. Suddenly there were so many possibilities and ideas flooding my mind. Knowledge is the ultimate power, and to the vivid imagination there are no boundaries.

If you doubt me, sit down with a five-year-old and ask him/her to tell you a story. They don't let reality fetter them. Their entire body radiates with excitement—the known and unknown.

Those early mental adventures I had as a child gave birth to a very curious muse. I made up stories of unbelievable bravery, pageantry, and adventure. I created worlds, creatures and characters. As a child, I never hesitated to exercise my writing muscle.

I was an adult before I seriously considered I had something to write about that someone else would care to read. But as a budding fiction writer, I was disheartened to constantly hear I should write what I knew.

What did I know that would interest anyone? The list would be really short, and, ahem, boring with a capital B.

Granted there are benefits to an author writing about a subject or time or people they're familiar with, or an expert on. But nobody should limit themselves to what they know, because most of us live in a very small world.

Besides, the really interesting stuff was always the unknown, at least for me.

That said, a writer can't or shouldn't fudge facts. They can't or shouldn't just make stuff up. Even the illogical needs a certain amount of logic to be plausible.

Good fiction has a strong base that's factual, or that falls within the realm of believability. Getting that information doesn't mean a writer must invest years of intense study. All that's necessary is gaining a working knowledge about that time, place and/or character. We're not writing dissertations. We're writing fiction whose foremost duty is to entertain.

Where the muse can open the door to imagination, research can fill in the holes and make the work cohesive. It's as simple as that. Facts can empower your story with richness, grip the reader in the subject, and propel them into a world they've only imagined.

There are a wealth of books out there on any subject under the sun. The internet provides more avenues to track down facts, from using search engines to surfing specialized websites and joining online groups. And there is always the old standby of authors contacting an expert and opening a dialogue where they can ask questions one on one.

A writer should never confine their imagination within the limitations of their present knowledge. Spread your wings and take your writing beyond what you know into what grabs your interest. Because if the unknown excites you, chances are it'll excite publishers and readers as well.

Open a book. Talk to experts. And always, let your imagination soar.