



## **FEBRUARY 2011 NEWSLETTER**

### **WRITERS TIPS**

“How does a book get written? One line at a time.”

I’m making two points here. One that writing a book is work. It takes time and effort and dedication, and the only way to get it done is by writing it word by word, line by line. But I’m also pointing out that EVERY line in a book matters. Every single one of them. No exceptions.

When people tell me, “this story wrote itself,” I always want to say, “That’s great. But did it rewrite itself?” During the rewriting process is when good writers really examine their books on a line-by-line basis. They rewrite the same sentence over and over till they get it right.

It could be that their word choice is off. Or the verb is not strong enough. Or the adjective doesn’t fit. It might be that the order of the sentence is wrong or the length or the style. Sometimes it’s that the sentence isn’t following where the preceding sentence led or isn’t setting up where the next sentence should go. Sometimes the tone is off or, worse yet, the sentence is actually beautifully written, quite lyrical really, but it just doesn’t belong.

It’s not uncommon for a good writer to spend minutes or even hours trying to get just one sentence or paragraph right. The other night, I spent half an hour writing and rewriting three short lines of dialogue, and in a children’s book no less. But what the kids said to each other in those three short lines and HOW they said it was critical. Those three little lines had to convey a slight shift in the children’s relationship, subtle growth in one of the characters, and rising tension for the reader, but they were also helping direct where the plot was going next. So in your writing DO sweat the small stuff, every “a,” “and” and “the.”

