



## The Germ of an Idea

I'd have to say the most popular question that people ask of a writer is, **"Where do you get your ideas?"** The question is asked in hushed tones as though ideas are an endangered species it is illegal to hunt. Nothing could be further from the truth. So, in this issue, I'll track an idea from germination to fruition and show you how easy it is to catch these critters.

You have to understand going in that I am not a believer in "writer's block". In my experience, it's a glamorous name for a simple syndrome: **Lack of BOCHOK** -- that's **Butt On Chair, Hands On Keyboard**. (Some writers are so superstitious they won't even speak the phrase "writer's block" aloud, for fear it will jump them the next time they go to the computer. I don't give bogey-men the time of day.)



**That doesn't mean there aren't times when I put in serious BOCHOK time and come up empty when I desperately need an idea.** It happened

not long ago when I was due to produce one of the weekly consumer newsletters I do for drycleaners to e-mail to their customers. I stared for a while, then I made some iced tea. I pet the cat. I turned on some music. I went out to check the mail. I pet the cat again. Not the bat of an idea stirring in the old belfry. **For some people, this is the start of the dreaded writer's block.**



I needed an idea and I needed it fast. I dropped my head... and looked at my shirt. It wasn't a particularly wonderful shirt, just a comfy t-shirt with a soothing print on it. To distract myself from the desperate need for an idea, I lost myself in the swirls and colors of the design....

I stared at the print and began to wonder how it had gotten there. Who designed it? How did they transfer it to the fabric? How many miles of cloth have this same print on them all across the country? **And the light bulb went on.**

Suddenly, my fingers were flying across the keyboard as I punched up Google and started asking my questions. **I was off on a hunt for information, knowing that if it interested me I could make it**

**interesting to others.** Within an hour I had learned more than I expected to ever know about fabric design and printing.

Another 45 minutes and I'd put together the graphics I needed, while letting the facts I'd learned steep in my mind. Then I married graphics and text and had a newsletter. I pet the cat again.

**You can check out the final result of the research, graphics and writing by clicking the screen images below**, which will take you to my website where it's stored for viewing -- **but do it later.** We're not done with fun yet for today.



## Getting Personal

So, how do you take my *ah-hah* moment and use it in your own life? There are times you need an idea, no matter what field you "grow" in. **Here are some things I've learned to use when the ideas are jammed in the pipe.**

**Put yourself in the picture.** Whether you're designing a newsletter, trying to find a better way to organize your home, or tussling with a problem at work, looking at the project from a personal point of view helps generate ideas. (I needed a newsletter topic last summer and I looked at my calendar. I had a trip coming up, so I figured lots of other people did, too. That gave me the idea to write about how to pack for a week in one small carry-on bag.)

**Browse the internet.** Put in some key words about whatever you're trying to get an idea for, and you'll come up with sites that may jar loose all kinds of things. (**Caution** -- this can be a real time-waster if you're not disciplined.)

**Sleep on it.** Many times I have consciously put my mind in thinking mode before falling asleep. Somehow, having the brain in idle gives your resting brain permission to be creative and come up with solutions. Keep paper and pen by the bed so you won't lose that brainstorm.



(of this article, **but scroll down for fun!**)



## *Writer's Resource of the Month*

Whether you're a writer, a writer-wanna-be, or just a curious person (let's face it, if you subscribed to this newsletter, you're curious in more ways than one) this month's featured websites will have something to tickle your mind.

1. [HowStuffWorks.com](http://HowStuffWorks.com) -- Ever wanted to know why a ballpoint pen was such a major innovation? Curious about why we sweat? Want to know what makes flowers smell good -- or make us sneeze? This site is the place for you. Just browsing the categories can make you giggle, but you'll learn a lot dipping into any one of them. **A super resource when you're just not sure how something actually functions and you need to write about it.** Remember, write your own words -- no stealing.
2. [Internet-Resources.com](http://Internet-Resources.com) -- **One of Writer's Digest's 101 Best Websites for Writers.** Information about networking and connecting to other writers or those who need writers; business information; historical and other reference links; style and grammar; and much, much more.



## Fun stuff of the Month

**OK, so I'm a fake Texan**, having only arrived four and a half years ago. But they do go on so about their BBQ beef, and I had to take a stab at it. (If you like HOT spices, this is NOT the recipe for you. I'm more of a sweet/mild cook.) I read about 15 recipes on the internet, talked to a true Southerner on the phone, and then averaged it all together to come up with my own. Give it a try!

**Ingredients:** 6 lb. beef brisket (I got a 12-pounder and froze half for next time -- with steak at \$9 a pound, brisket is a steal at 99 cents a pound!), 1 large onion, 3 tablespoons prepared chopped garlic, 3 cups of NON-DIET cola, 1 cup brown sugar, 2 cups of your favorite BBQ sauce (Kraft Original worked fine for me.)

**How to:** Use a big roasting pan (think turkey pan with lid) or a roasting bag. Cut onion into slices and separate slices into rings. Put half on the bottom of the pan. Put brisket on top of onion rings. Spread prepared minced garlic on meat, then brown sugar. Put the rest of the onion rings all over the top of the meat, and press down slightly into the sugar. Mix up the cola and BBQ sauce, and pour gently over the top of the whole thing. Put on the lid/seal the bag. Place in a 300 degree oven and bake one hour per pound (no, that's not a typo) or longer until meat is tender and fabulous. (REAL Texans dig a pit in the back yard and cook the stuff over coals for days, but who's got time for that?) Serve on buns or bread with a salad or other favorite side dishes. *Yum!*

### **Brain-teaser**

There are 30 books of the Bible in this paragraph. Can you find them? This is a most remarkable puzzle. It was found by a gentleman in an airplane seat pocket on a flight from Los Angeles to Honolulu, keeping him occupied for hours. He enjoyed it so much, he passes it on to some friends. One friend from Illinois worked on this while fishing from his john boat. Another friend studied it while playing his banjo. Elaine Taylor, a columnist friend judges the job of solving his puzzle so involving, she brews a cup of tea to help her nerves. There will be some names that are really easy to spot. That's a fact. Some people however will soon find themselves in a jam, especially since the book names are not necessarily capitalized. Truthfully, from answers we get, we are forced to admit it usually takes a minister or scholar to see some of them at the worst. Research has shown that something in our genes is responsible for the difficulty we have in seeing the books in this paragraph. During a recent fund raising event, which featured this puzzle, the Alpha Delta Phi lemonade booth set a new sales record. The local paper, *The Chronicle*, surveyed over 200 patrons who reported that this puzzle was one of the most difficult they have ever seen. As Daniel Humana humbly puts it, the books are all right here in plain view hidden from sight. Those able to find all of them will hear great lamentations from those who have to be shown. One revelation that may help is that books like Timothy and Samuel may occur without their numbers. Also keep in mind, that punctuation and spaces in the middle are normal. A chipper attitude will help you compete really well against those who claim to know the answers. Remember, there is no need for a mad exodus, as there really are 30 books of the Bible lurking somewhere in this paragraph waiting to be found.

**(I'll give the answers in the next newsletter. I did not write this; I just pass it on because it drives people nuts -- and I need the company.)**

***Thanks for reading, and see you next month!***

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