

Conflict—an Insider's View

By Carol Ann Erhardt

Conflict exists for each of us from the moment we open our eyes to a new day, until, hopefully, we put it aside and fall asleep at night. How we deal with the conflict is what determines our mental state, our outward demeanor, and, ultimately, our lives.

This year has been full of many conflicts for me on a personal basis. I've tried to meet each one with a positive result in mind. Sometimes I win, sometimes I fail...but I never give up. I believe that God never closes a door without providing an unlocked window.

In our writing, our characters must also face conflicts. Without conflict, our story has no substance. So, what kind of conflicts should our characters face? One way to find the answer is to take examples from our own lives. This year I moved my elderly mother into our home. Conflict? You bet! Our home is no longer "just ours." Our lives have changed. I'm an amiable...bet you couldn't have guessed that, right? Ha. Anyway, I want to make my mother happy and comfortable. I also want to make my hubby happy. Sometimes these needs are at opposite ends. As a result, I am the one who winds up being torn apart because I can't always meet both their needs.

Okay, so if I were going to build a character with inner conflict, I could use myself as an example. I could put my character, who wants to please everyone, into a situation where she can't possibly succeed. And, let's take it one step further. I do not do yard work. No way. I detest bugs, insects, and arachnids. Suppose our heroine is a single mom. She must support her school-age child and she's lost her job. The only job she's been offered is to care for a cantankerous woman who demands that our heroine keep the flower beds weeded and maintain the vegetable garden. Add to that, she's expected to stay late which means she has to trust a babysitter to ensure her child has someplace to stay until our heroine gets home.

Not enough conflict yet? Suppose the woman's son comes to visit. He's clearly attracted to our heroine, and his mother objects. This fuels our very rich, very egotistical hero to pursue the heroine with even more gusto. She can't stand the guy. He reminds her of her ex, who ditched her as soon as he secured his dream job as a plastic surgeon. More conflict.

We can continue this way, layering the conflict into scenes which drive our story. The conflict will hook the reader and make the reader a part of the action. Once you identify your characters inner conflict, outer conflict, and vulnerabilities, you will be well on your way to writing a fantastic story with larger than life characters your readers will remember.

Have fun dreaming up conflicts. Me? I'm going upstairs to face two people who will each have a different perspective on what I should fix for dinner, and it won't be what I had in mind.

A wise friend told me: "Follow your heart and use your God-given talents in whatever ways you see best. Get back to the joy of writing and the rest will follow."

I hope you follow your heart in all you do.