



# THE STORYTELLER

July-August, 2017

## HUGE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY/THRILLER GIVEAWAY

BookSweeps

Enter to Win 25+ Christian Mysteries & Thrillers (And More!)

This week, I have a fun surprise: I've teamed up with 25+ Christian/inspirational mystery & thriller authors to give away a huge collection of novels to 2 lucky winners, PLUS a Kindle Fire or Nook Tablet to the Grand Prize winner!

You can win my novel, **The Copper Box**, plus books from authors like **Susan May Warren**, **Cara Putnam**, and **Linda Fulkerson**.

Enter the giveaway by clicking here: [bit.ly/2u9Z7ep](http://bit.ly/2u9Z7ep) Monday 7/24-Monday 7/31  
Good luck, and enjoy!

## THE STORYTELLER ON MY DESK

The little figure at the top of this newsletter is a pueblo storyteller. I bought it in the early 1990s from potter Carol Suina at Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico (near Santa Fe). Grandma Storyteller, my name for the figure, sits on my desk beside the computer. Over the years she's become my writing mascot.

### *Storyteller Ceramic Figures: a tradition is born*

Rewind thirty years. In the early 1960s, life was hard for Helen Cordero of Cochiti Pueblo. There simply wasn't enough money to cover the basic needs for her and her family. As the story goes, Helen asked her grandmother how she could make a living. Her grandmother told her the earth always provided for their people. So around 1964 Helen dug some special white clay from the ground near Cochiti and fashioned the figure of a grandfather with five children in his lap. His mouth was open, and the children were listening eagerly to the stories he told. Later she said her own grandfather was the model for that first storyteller. She remembered the children of the pueblo gathered around while he told the traditional stories of the people.

Helen Cordero made a few more ceramic figures and entered them in the New Mexico State Fair. They won prizes. The next year she entered more figures in the Santa Fe Indian Market. Again they won prizes. People started talking about her figures and writing about them. Other potters began producing a wide array of figures from the special clay. Artists fashioned manger scenes, corn huskers, drummers, and even animal storytellers.

### *Grandma Storyteller's Roles*

Though all she does is sit on my desk, Grandma Storyteller helps me in my writing. Maybe her most important role is to keep me connected to my childhood dreams of writing stories. You see, it was my grandfather who introduced me to the joy of making up our own stories. These days I'm a few years older than he was when we sat on the sofa in the den inventing adventures for a tame griffon named Charlie.

Grandma Storyteller also reminds me I'm a storyteller, not a literary novelist with my heart set on writing the Great American Novel. She reminds me of all the other storytellers who sit in rocking chairs enchanting children with made up stories and storytellers who labor in front of computers spinning yarns to take adults on adventures in different times and places.

Another important role Grandma Storyteller plays is helping me remember where my stories come from. Cochiti potters use white clay they find near their village to fashion their imaginative figures. I use memories of places where I've felt at home. Place is as important to my stories as it is to the figures made by the pueblo potters. When I began *The Copper Box*, I chose to write a story set in one of my favorite towns: Jerome, Arizona.

When I get too attached to one story, Grandma Storyteller challenges me with all the stories I have left to tell. While I wait to hear the fate of one novel, I start another one. This little figure also helps me remember my audience. My goal is to write a story smoothly enough that my adult readers will forget, at least for a few hours, where they are and the problems they face.

### *My First Story Child Leaves Home*

Over the last few years Grandma Storyteller has helped me invent a new life story: one that connects my past dreams to my present and my future. Each story I write is a child sitting in my lap, a child I will eventually declare grown-up enough to go out into the world and seek her (or his) fortune. On June 6, my first story child peeked out of a window on Amazon. She took with her the story of a little copper box and the people searching for it. How will she fare? I hope many people enjoy her story because I think it's the best one I've told so far. But deep down, I'm not too attached to her success. Every time I look at Grandma Storyteller, I remember I have many more story children in my arms.

## **GAMES CATS PLAY (AND THE LESSONS WE LEARN)**

### *Powderpuff Hockey*

About a month ago as I was cleaning out my purse, I dropped an old compact on the kitchen floor. It broke and the powderpuff fell out. Shimmer came to investigate. Putting out a tentative paw, she pushed it. It slid nicely on the linoleum, so she pushed it again. I flicked it with my fingers, and she chased it. She lost interest, but I left the powderpuff there to see if she would return to it.

A couple of hours later, I watched the first game of powderpuff hockey between Team Shimmer and Team Scamp. The two cats were in the kitchen. Shimmer approached the puck and began expertly batting it back and forth between her paws. Scamp watched with some interest until play halted when the puck slid out of bounds under the refrigerator. Acting as referee, I retrieved the puck with a wooden spoon.

Team Scamp resumed play, sending the powderpuff sliding across the floor into the laundry room. Play halted again when the puck slid under the washing machine. Team Scamp watched the play with growing interest but didn't take to the floor. Team Shimmer tossed the puff, and in a crowd-pleasing maneuver, caught it mid-air and carried it onto the carpet in the dining room for an intermission.

After a few moments, Team Shimmer put the puck in the center of the kitchen floor and took a time-out. Team Scamp came out of the bleachers to examine the puck. Giving it an experimental bat, he seemed pleased with the long, straight slide down the linoleum. As he got more familiar with the game, he slid the puck toward Team Shimmer.

Accepting the challenge, Team Shimmer came out of her corner. She approached the

puck and batted it toward Team Scamp, who returned the slide. The puck slid back and forth until the score was tied at four all. Suddenly Team Scamp picked up the puck and carried into the carpeted workroom. After a significant time out when the ref was unable to find the puck, Team Shimmer went to her favorite chair, declaring the game officially over. (Yes, there's a tiny bit of embellishment. It's called "poetic license.")

### *The Lesson*

All it takes is a different perspective to see a new purpose for an old possession. I needed a plant stand for a large peace lily a friend gave me, but I didn't want to buy one. In my garage I found an old bathroom trash can—dark green, square, sturdy plastic. Thinking of the powderpuff hockey puck, I turned the trashcan upside down. It was the perfect size and height for my plant.

## **THE BUSINESS END OF WRITING**

When I started dreaming about becoming a writer, I thought my job would be to imagine stories and get them on paper. I thought an editor would revise my stories until they fit the market and gripped readers. The business of writing would be taken care of by my publisher. That scenario was true sixty years ago. But is there anything the same today as it was sixty years ago? Possibly, but certainly not the business end of writing.

### *Traditional or Indie?*

Today once the story is written, a writer must do her own editing or pay someone to do it for her. Next she must choose which publication route to follow: "traditional" (a publishing company does the work of creating a book from a manuscript, sells the books, and pays the author royalties) or "independent" (the author does everything herself, bears 100% of the expenses, and keeps 100% of the income). I chose the traditional publication route. Due to my age and the limits on my energy, I want to work with a team. If I were twenty or thirty I might make a different choice.

### *Promotion*

So now we have the story, the edited manuscript, and the book. What's left? Promotion. (It used to be called advertising.) Guess what? These days the author is in charge of most of that end of the business. Even the few large publishers left don't do a lot of promotion, so only very famous writers can leave spreading the word about their books to chance. And the competition is mind-numbing. *The Copper Box*, for example, ranks #541,604 on Amazon.

Authors are advised to promote their books on Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, and Goodreads. We're told to participate in blog tours and book giveaways (see the first item in this newsletter.) Above all, we're advised to build an email list. It turns out that after all is said and done, the best way to sell books is one-to-one advertising. Meanwhile, authors must keep writing. The conventional wisdom says it takes five books before an author can count on predictable income. My publisher told me to expect to earn about \$500 from *The Copper Box* this first year. I made \$48 total from

my two textbooks last year. (That's actually not bad considering they were published almost twenty years ago.)

### *You Can Help*

As with any business, customer satisfaction is the best predictor of success. You know those emails you get from Amazon, saying, "How many stars would you give book x, y, or z?" Answer them! Book reviews help immensely. When a potential reader hears about a book and goes to Amazon to decide whether to buy or not, he looks at the reviews. They don't have to be long—one or two sentences. After you read *The Copper Box*, if you like it, please take the time to post a brief review. Thanks!

## MY WRITING LIFE

### *Work in Progress*

So while I'm learning the business of writing, what am I working on? You may remember the trailer for *Guardians of the Canyon* on my website. I had what I thought was a complete manuscript, only to be told by the editor I'd like to sell this book to that I needed to move the incident that happened at midpoint up to the end of chapter three. At first I resisted. But then I began to play around with what she was suggesting. And guess what? She was right! The book took on an urgency it had lacked. But it also needed to be rewritten. I was about 2/3 of the way through the rewrite when Mantle Rock Publishing accepted *The Copper Box*. I was immediately immersed in editing, book covers, acknowledgments, and you guessed it—promotion. I've been rereading what I've written of *Guardians*, and I'm getting back to the story. Next week I hope to begin writing again.

### *Next Up*

While I'm determined to finish *Guardians*, I've also started to think in terms of a modest series of Jerome mysteries. Though I didn't consciously write it this way, the ending of *The Copper Box* is a nice set up for a second story. (I won't tell you why.) I'm in touch with some friends who lived in Jerome for many years, and we're going to do some serious brainstorming. If you see further mysteries that might grow out of this one, drop me a line at [suzannebratcher@gmail.com](mailto:suzannebratcher@gmail.com). I'd love to hear your ideas.

*Thanks for reading!*

*Suzanne*