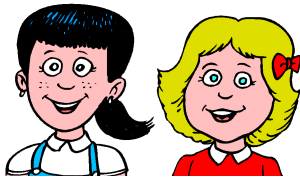


Tea Time with



IMAGINARY FRIENDS: TRAINING SCHOOL FOR FICTION WRITERS



I had an imaginary friend when I was little. Despite my youth, I sort of knew my friend wasn't the real magilla. I think I even called her "my imaginary friend" sometimes. But though she was imaginary, she was still my friend. She had personality. She had quirks. She had a rich life full of fantastic dragons and daring knights. She had shiny black hair, unlike my drab dishwater blonde. For some reason, I never gave her a name. (Early signs of writer's block? Jealousy over her beautiful black hair?)

Still, I loved my imaginary friend. She and I used to ride the bus with my mom. My friend would sit on the empty seat beside mine. One day, a very large lady got on the bus and sat where I'd put my imaginary friend. I was horrified. "Mom!" I shrieked, "She sat on my friend!" The friend may have been imaginary, but that didn't make her any less real to me. In fact, she was just as real to me *then*, as my fictional characters are to me *now*.

How can that be? Well, before I sit down to begin a story, I make my characters write their autobiographies; I interview them extensively and put them through a battery of psychological tests. By the time I actually start writing, I know my characters better than I know my best friends, my kids, my husband, almost better than I know myself. Once I start writing, my characters are more than imaginary. They're real!



You'd think it would be easier now, working with my fictional characters. But it isn't so. When something about my story isn't working, and I know I have to change it, I resist. It's as though, once I think up the characters and the situation they're in, once they begin

acting out their assigned . . . is very difficult for me to

But it does have its fun moments. I get to place stumbling blocks in their way. I throw complications and hardships at them. Sometimes I ask my hero and heroine to tell me exactly what sort of lover they are looking for--and then I give them somebody as opposite as possible! I'm not just being cruel. Like loving parents, writers know that learning to solve problems and work through difficulties leads to growth and makes our characters better people.

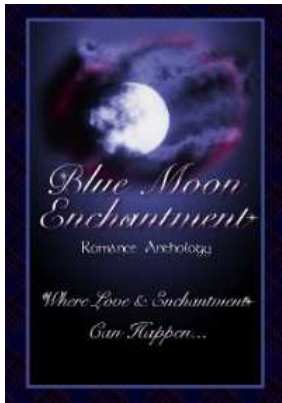


There's a quote from the book *Around the Circle Gently* (co-edited by *moi!*) that illustrates this perfectly: "The least useful thing I can do for those I love is to save them from their own pain. When I try to rescue or protect them from the full realization of their own truths or solve their problems for them, I weaken their initiative and confidence. When they are allowed to make their own mistakes, they learn valuable lessons." (Roberta Jean Bryant)

So, if my character gets his or her perfect lover, there goes the opportunity for growth. There are no sparks. No conflicts. No reason to do heroic things. No chance to make sacrifices. No grounds for forgiveness and redemption. Those are the things that breathe life into a character and a story. And once they've walked through fire and come out unscathed, there's the joy of discovering that the "perfect" lover was either a cad or would have been all wrong for them anyway, and the one they ended up with, the one they walked through fire for, *is* the perfect lover for them. And coincidentally, it makes for a more interesting story!

It's not so different from real life. We must frequently deal with the very last things we want to face: illnesses, broken relationships, financial setbacks, the death of loved ones. It's easy to conclude at times that God or the Universe has it in for us. Later, we can look back and see that these same events taught us strength and wisdom. It should be no different for the characters in our books.

♪ ♪ GONNA TAKE A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY ... ♪



“Sentimental Journey” is the title of my short story appearing in the *Blue Moon Enchantment* anthology. Originally scheduled for release in June, a printing glitch set production back a few months but now the book is out.

A blue moon is a rare phenomenon, when there are two full moons in one month. And no, it

isn't really blue. But their rarity has led to various legends about them, including the one that says if you make a wish on a blue moon the wish will come true.

“Sentimental Journey” is a departure from my usual Regency fare. The story takes place during WWII and features Howie and Eve, young lovers separated by the tragedies of war. But Eve refuses to believe Howie is lost forever to her. She makes a wish upon a blue moon, and against all odds ... Well, I don't want to spoil the ending for you, so why don't you buy a copy of *Blue Moon Enchantment* and find out what happens next? In addition to my story, there are 14 others in this anthology, covering the range from historical to modern times. You can buy the book at your favorite bookstore, or order it online at [Barnes & Noble](http://www.barnesandnoble.com) and [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

One fun aspect for me was that I set the story in Tacoma, Washington, where I grew up. I used several real sites and buildings in the telling, some of them legendary in Pacific Northwest history.

One of these is the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Howie and Eve have a favorite “parking” spot on the bluff overlooking the site of the first Tacoma Narrows Bridge, which collapsed after a spectacular bucking performance during a windstorm in 1940. A second bridge was finally completed in 1950. Fifty-plus years later the traffic volume has increased so much that another bridge was needed. Construction began in 2003 on a new Narrows Bridge that's going up alongside the current one.

They are in the final phase now, lifting sections of bridge decking into place from barges in the water several hundred feet below. Each deck section weighs 488 tons. If you are interested in seeing information about the new bridge, here's a link:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/sr16narrowsbridge/>

Another historic landmark mentioned in “Sentimental Journey” is my husband Rein's alma mater, Stadium High School, located in Tacoma. This unique structure was built to resemble a French chateau in the late 1890s and became a high school in 1906. Stadium has a fascinating history--100 years of it. They celebrated their centennial this year, which just happened to be Rein's 50th-year reunion as well. A link to Stadium and its history:

<http://www.klippert.com/Stadium/History.html>

Stadium High School also stood in for the high school attended by the characters in the film *10 Things I Hate About You*. Normally, Rein isn't much into watching teen flicks, but of course, he had to see that one!

Now that *Blue Moon Enchantment* is out, I'll be doing book signings with two other authors from the anthology: Jacquie Rogers and Sherrie Holmes. Not only are these ladies terrific writers, but they're also my friends and writing buddies from way back when! The first one is October 7, 4 to 6 pm, in the ballroom of the Coast Hotel in Bellevue, in conjunction with the Emerald City Writers Conference. I'll post other signings on my website as soon as we have dates finalized. If you live in Western Washington, please check back to see if there is an event near you. We'd love to meet you!

ESTONIAN INTERLUDE!



The Republic of Estonia is a small country located in Eastern Europe, between Latvia and Russia. It borders both the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland, and covers an area slightly smaller than New Hampshire and Vermont combined. It has a turbulent history and a fiercely proud people. It is also my husband's birthplace, a matter of some pride for him.

Estonian warriors recently invaded my part of the world, sacked the village and took hostages. Or so it seemed.

This summer we hosted members of my husband's family visiting from Estonia. Rein's cousin Mati, his wife Ene, their younger son Sven and their teenaged grandson Magnus stayed with us during their American holiday.



Ene, Mati, Magnus, and Sven, with me and my husband Rein, and our Scottish Deerhound Ana



My daughter Jenny, with Magnus and Sven, and good old Ana

Thank goodness Rein speaks Estonian, because his relatives' knowledge of English doesn't get us much past the basics. We had a shared moment of laughter when Jenny discovered that the Estonian phrase "shut up" sounds almost exactly like "zucchini"! But we got along. Jenny took the younger members of the party to a Mariners game, the Experience Music Project, the waterfront and aquarium (all the relatives took in this last) and a couple of ferry rides across Puget Sound, the second one at night so Sven could get some pictures of Seattle dressed in her night lights.

Our granddaughter had been living with us for the past year and a half, and we got her shoveled out of the house just in time to shovel in these Estonian natives. With the aid of my husband, they invaded and conquered Yellowstone National Park, San Francisco, Seattle, and other well-known tourist destinations. They had a blast, language barriers notwithstanding, and so did we!

CONFERENCE JET-SETTER

There are two large romance gatherings in the US each year--the Romance Writers of America (RWA) conference and the Romantic Times (RT) convention. Both take place in luxurious hotels in various cities around the country, garner around 2,000 registrants, have huge book signing events with several hundred authors participating, attract romance industry professionals, offer workshops about writing, and give out awards.



The "Three Amigos" at RWA. Gerri Russell, me, and Joleen Weiser--friends and critique partners.

And there the similarity ends. RWA is all about the writers--networking, learning their craft, seeing old friends. Although it certainly has its fun moments, its

primary purpose is serious--helping writers who aren't published yet to gain the skills and contacts to become so, and in addition help published authors learn more about the business side of writing.

RT is intended mainly for the romance readers, has multiple events to entertain and honor them, and has a party every night. Did I mention cover models? Its atmosphere is much more relaxed, intended to promote authors and readers meeting and getting to know each other.

Since 1994 I have attended RWA conferences, missing only one in those thirteen years. But this year was my first RT. I couldn't have chosen a better one to begin with. It was at Daytona Beach, and the hotel's back door led onto a beautiful, sandy beach. The weather was perfect, the hotel magnificent, the beach was--suffice it to say I've always found large bodies of water to be very inspirational--and, no, I'm not referring to the cover model volleyball game every morning! Besides, this was the RT where my friend and hotel roommate Gerri Russell was announced as the American Title II contest winner! I can honestly say that this won't be my last RT, although I won't expect another one to be quite as spectacular!



Gerri and a poster-sized copy of her book cover at RT



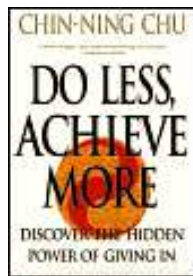
Gerri and me at the RT ball in our finest duds, complete with fairy wings

DO LESS, ACHIEVE MORE

I am currently reading *Do Less, Achieve More: Discover the Hidden Power of Giving In*, by Chin-Ning Chu. It's an amazing book, and of course the premise is that when we get all frenzied and try to accomplish too much, our efficiency falls off and we don't accomplish what we want. I know it's certainly true of me. When I'm overwhelmed by too many tasks on my "to-do" list, I flit from one to another, never getting far on anything before I flit to the next, and generally wear myself out in the process so that I need a break from doing nothing!

Chin-Ning Chu uses as a metaphor a Rainmaker, called to a village to end a five-year-long drought. Promptly upon arrival he set up a tent and disappeared inside for four days. The villagers were unhappy at wasting their money on the famous rainmaker, who was doing nothing to solve their problem. However, on the fifth day, the skies opened up and it poured, ending the long drought. The people thanked the Rainmaker for the miracle, only to be told "I have done nothing." Amazed, the villagers asked for an explanation. He simply said, "When I arrived the first thing I noticed was that everything in your village was out of harmony with heaven. So I spent four days putting myself into harmony with the Divine. Then the rains came."

This is only a little taste of what the book contains-- nothing less than instructions on how to learn to focus on what is important in your life so that what gets done are the things you really want to accomplish. I heartily recommend it!



REGENCIES ARE ALIVE AND WELL, THANK YOU VERY MUCH

It's true. While the big NY publishers have discontinued publishing traditional Regencies, the smaller presses are gobbling them up. I have an extensive list of publishers that are still putting out traditional Regencies and sweeter historicals. If you're a fan of either, stop by my website to view the list. <http://www.judithlaik.com/>

YOU SAY TO-MAH-TO, I SAY TO-MAY-TO

My last name is Laik -- pronounced "like." In case you didn't know already, the name is Estonian.

If I had a penny for every time I've heard my last name mispronounced as "lake," I'd be a rich woman. Maybe even rich enough to hire a publicist to write my newsletters for me instead of slaving over a hot keyboard myself. Alas, the few times I've tried to levy a penny-fine for mispronunciation, all I get is laughter.

But a friend of mine made a comment about the trick she uses to help her remember how to pronounce my name correctly, and it tickled me so much I thought I'd pass it on to my newsletter readers.

She uses the title of a bestseller to remember that Laik is pronounced as like: *Like Water for Chocolate*. Considering that my friend is a writer, and I'm a writer, and the thing she uses as a reminder is the title of a book, I thought that was terribly clever!

So, if we run into each other and you can't remember how to pronounce Laik, just think of the book *Like Water for Chocolate*. Of course with my luck, everyone will start calling me Judy Water or Judy Chocolate. ☺

That actually happened to a friend of mine, by the way. During my college days a friend was trying to use the word association trick to remember names and she introduced Frances Goodrich as Frances Firestone!

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Estonians - family members
Three amigos - Jacquie Rogers
Gerri's poster - Judy Laik
Faery wings - Debra Parmley

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