



Wm. Delia Books

Write Now

the monthly e-newsletter from Wm. Delia Books

Email: wmdeliabooks@gmail.com

Web: <http://wmdeliabooks.com>

Issue 7

December 2021

Writing can be a solitary activity. It's easy to find yourself alone with only your characters to keep you company. Sometimes this is not a bad thing, it lets you concentrate on the story. However, a writer also needs feedback about what they are writing.

Enter the writers' group.

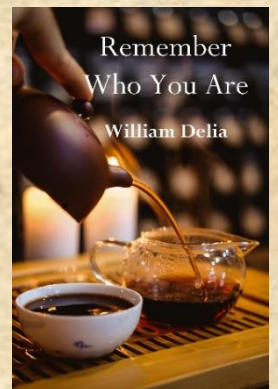
Writers' groups work in different ways, but most include the opportunity to read your work for others who are also writers. Their reactions can keep a plot on track or reign in unruly characters. Sometimes the feedback is technical—addressing style, or grammar or point of view. Other times it's about tone, story arc or character development. Either form can be helpful.

I belong to two writers' groups and both have helped to shape my work. Their comments are always constructive, even when they are critical. I am grateful for them both and have come to depend on their insight and critiques.

Update

I continue to write and rewrite several projects, including my newest novel, working title now **Relative Proof**. Progress is slow as my time is divided among multiple projects. I have reached the midpoint of the book, which means something big is about to happen. I can't wait to find out what!

If you will allow me a moment of shameless self-promotion, the Christmas shopping season is here and books make wonderful gifts. Especially books written by someone you know! All of my books are available through Amazon.com and for those of you who live nearby, I have a few copies of each one, if you would like to get a copy from me. Give the gift of reading this year, and support your local authors!



Current Titles – Available on Amazon.com or from the author

<p>Novels</p> <p>Healing River Home to the Mountains I Once Was Lost Truth, Lies & Consequences One Day More Shelter from the Storm Remember Who You Are—New!</p>	<p>Books of Faith</p> <p>Jesus Told Them Many Things – Devotional Standing on the Promises – Devotional Waiting for the Light – Advent Study</p>
<p>Children's Book</p> <p>Bucky the Manatee</p>	<p>Poetry Collection</p> <p>On the Edge of Forever</p>

Recent Selection

In honor of the Christmas season, I've included below a short story set in my beloved Adirondack Mountains and offering another view of Christmas. May your Christmas season be a blessed one.

Another Christmas

© Wm. Delia

Park Ranger Travis Warner stood outside his cabin admiring the first star of Christmas Eve as it hovered over Hurricane Mountain. He smiled, then kicked the snow off his boots and stepped inside.

"Daniel? I'm home."

No answer.

On the kitchen table he found a note. "Gone to Joula's to check on the animals. Daniel."

Travis muttered, "Thank God for Nikki Joula."

Who would imagine that a veterinarian would also have the healing touch for a little boy? Daniel had struggled to adjust to life in the mountains after his mother died. He had lived all of his eleven years in the city, so coming to live with his uncle in the Adirondack Mountains was a difficult change. But once Daniel met Nikki, her barn at the bottom of Warner Hill became his go-to spot.

Travis was taking off his jacket when his phone rang. Caller ID said, "Nikki J".

"Hey, Nikki, what's up? Don't tell me another circus train has derailed and now you have elephants—"

"Uncle Travis—it's Daniel. I need your help. Nikki and Aaron aren't home yet, and there's someone in the barn. I think there are two of them—maybe more."

"Stay in the house, Daniel. Lock the doors and call 911. I'm on my way."

Travis' first thought was of the two fugitives who robbed Nikki a few months ago looking for drugs. He retrieved his shotgun from the gun safe, slid into his boots, and charged out the front door. Taking a shortcut through the woods, moments later, he emerged behind Nikki's house. He switched off his flashlight and took the back-door steps two at a time. Inside, he saw Daniel looking out the kitchen window toward the barn. He tapped gently on the back-door glass to get his attention.

"Uncle Travis. I didn't know what to do."

"You did exactly right. Did you call 911?"

"Yes—they said a deputy is on the way but he's coming from Tupper Lake."

"It'll take too long for him to get here. I'm going to check this out. Do you remember how I showed you to use this?"

The boy took the shotgun from him and said, "Yes, sir, but I don't want to."

"I don't want you to, either. It's just a last resort. Stay here and don't let anyone in."

Travis drew his service pistol and went out the front door. In a few quick strides, he pressed up close against the barn wall.

After a quick glance through the window, he stepped into the open doorway and shined his flashlight on the intruders.

"Don't move," he said. "What are you—"

The glowing halo cast by his flashlight revealed a young woman lying on a pile of hay. Her head rested against the chest of a young man sitting next to her. She looked up at Travis with wide eyes barely visible beneath the headscarf pulled tight against her face.

The young woman moaned low and long. Travis noticed she was pregnant and lowered his gun.

“I’m Ranger Travis Warner,” he said in his kindest voice. “Who are you and why are you here?”

The man answered, “Please, Ranger, our car slid off the road, and it is so cold. We only want a place to stay the night. But we’ll go, if you’ll let us. Please.”

“Let’s take one step at a time. Are you hurt? Is she hurt?”

“Hurt? No—but I think the baby will come soon.”

“Okay,” Travis ran through his limited options in his mind.

The young man said again, “Please let us go—we do not mean any harm.”

Outside, he heard a car grinding up the steep gravel driveway. A moment later, Travis heard voices, and Nikki and Aaron Joula appeared in the doorway.

The woman moaned again, louder, and longer this time. Nikki quickly assessed the situation and didn’t hesitate.

She said, “Travis, add some wood to the wood stove, please. And, Aaron, close that door, it’s cold in here.”

Nikki opened the corner closet and took out a stack of horse blankets. She handed three to the young man and then draped the fourth over the woman as she kneeled next to her. Nikki rested her hand on the woman’s distended belly and smiled warmly.

“I’m Nikki Joula and that is my husband, Aaron. This is our barn. What in the world are you two doing out on a night like this—especially in your condition?”

The young man said, “She does not speak English. Her name is Mariama, and I am her husband, Yausef. We are on our way to Canada. She has family in Toronto and wants her baby to be born there.”

“I’m afraid the baby has other ideas,” Nikki said. “I’m not a doctor, I’m a veterinarian, but I’ve seen this before. This baby is coming soon.”

The door creaked open, and Daniel stepped inside.

“Daniel, I told you to stay in the house,” Travis said.

“I know—but I saw Nikki and Aaron come in and then the 911 dispatcher called, so I decided—”

“It’s okay, Daniel. What did the dispatcher say?”

“She said the deputy got sidetracked by an injury accident on Route 30—a truck and two or three cars. She wanted to know if we could wait.”

Aaron said, “Sounds like the paramedics will be busy, too. I’ll call her back.”

“Travis, I’m sorry we weren’t here,” Nikki said. “Aaron had an early Christmas Eve Service at the County Home.” She turns to the young couple and adds, “My husband is pastor for two churches.”

Yausef smiled and said, “Now I understand why Allah has led us here.”

He said something in a foreign language to his wife and she smiled back at him.

“Should I be boiling water or something?” Travis asked.

“Sure, why not—it always helps on TV,” Nikki said with a laugh. “I’d like to move her inside the house, but I don’t know—”

Mariama moaned long and loud again.

“Okay—looks like we’ll do this the old-fashioned way. Let’s make her as comfortable as we can, right here. This baby isn’t going to wait.”

Aaron returned from the house with an armload of clean sheets and pillows.

“Travis,” Nikki said, “in that cabinet over there, you’ll find a large stainless-steel bowl and some antiseptic soaps. Daniel, would you fill up that kettle and put it on top of the woodstove to warm?”

Mariama’s moans got louder. Nikki held her hand and whispered encouragement.

“Nikki, she doesn’t speak English,” Travis said.

“I know—but she understands me. Why don’t you three give us a little privacy?”

“Right,” Aaron said, and he led Travis and Daniel to the converted stall that served as Nikki’s office.

Mariama moaned again, but this time the sound was muffled by a chorus of barnyard noises echoing off the walls of the barn—moos, brays, baas, even a rooster crowing far too early for sunrise.

Travis heard one sound he didn’t recognize, and said to Aaron, “What is that?”

“Camels—the last of our derailed circus train guests. Stay away from them—they’ll spit on you if you get too close.”

Travis looked around and then said to Aaron, “This is what it was like, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“That first Christmas. A young couple, far from home, with no place to stay. Their baby being born in a stable with all the animals...”

“For a guy who seldom comes to church, that is a good observation. I was just thinking the same thing, myself.”

“Aaron, when you read the story on Christmas Eve, it all sounds so...”

“So, what?”

“So orderly, clean, sanitary, even though it’s a stable. Not like this place. No offense, Aaron, but your barn is dirty, crowded and, well, it smells bad.”

“That’s the pygmy hippo—he’s not housebroken yet.”

“Well, that’s one good thing. I don’t remember a pygmy hippo at the first Christmas.”

“Probably not—but sheep and cows and donkeys aren’t much better.”

“So, why were they there? Mary and Joseph, I mean, why?”

“Because there was no room—”

“Yeah, I know, no room at the inn. But why didn’t they have a reservation? Why couldn’t God do better than having the Christ child born in a barn?”

Aaron said, “I think God was making a point. Jesus could have been born anywhere—a palace, in the temple, anywhere. But God chose a stable to show people what God had in mind. The Christ Child did not come to the elite and the powerful. The Christ Child came to everyone, even the lowliest of the low.”

Travis was silent for a few moments, then he said, “What will happen to them?”

“Honestly? I’m afraid to think. They were driving mountain roads through a blizzard trying to get to Toronto with her ready to give birth. Why would anyone do that?”

“Because they couldn’t stay here. They didn’t feel welcome or safe. Probably because they are Muslim.”

Aaron nodded and said, “These days, most people see someone from the Middle East and assume two things—they must be Muslim, and I better not turn my back on them. Often people like Yausef and Mariama come here to escape persecution. They are not welcome in their homeland because people think they’re not Syrian or Iraqi or Iranian enough. Then they come here and they’re not welcome because people think they’re too Syrian or too Iraqi or too Iranian. They’re caught in the middle without a place to call home.”

“So, what do we do? It’s Christmas Eve, and we’ve got two refugees—”

The wail of a newborn baby cut through the night.

Travis chuckled and started over, “We’ve got three refugees on our hands.”

Aaron smiled, “I can’t speak for you, but I’m going in there to admire God’s latest Christmas miracle.”

Aaron, Travis and Daniel found Mariama holding her newborn baby wrapped in a flowery pillowcase. She handed the child to Yausef who cradled him in his arms and brought him over to Aaron.

“Pastor, would you please pray God’s blessing for our son?”

“You understand, I am not a Muslim. I’m a Christian?”

“Yes—but you are a holy man, right? A man of God?”

“I try to serve God, yes.”

“Then you are the one. Allah led us here to this place—to you. Christian, Muslim—we are both descendants of Abraham. If Allah chose for our child to be born in your barn, then who are we to question? Please, a blessing?”

Aaron took the child, held him up, and said, “Bless this child, O God, born this holy night. Claim him as your own—a beloved child of God. Watch over him this day and every day of his life. Amen.”

Aaron cradled the baby so that Travis and Daniel could see him, then he said, “Hear God’s good news! Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given.”

Travis smiled and mumbled, “Maybe this time we can get it right...”

“What did you say, Uncle Travis?” Daniel said.

“I said, Merry Christmas, Daniel. Merry Christmas to us all!”

You have been selected to receive these brief updates because you have shown interest in my writing. If you would prefer not to receive future issues, simply reply to this email with “NOT INTERESTED” in the subject line and I will remove you from the list.