

On Writing Two Books at Once

For the past few months, I have been trying to work on two novels at the same time. Eventually I'll write both, but for now, I'm giving up on one. Despite setting up a structured schedule that leaves time for each book, only one seems to be progressing while the other has stagnated. The books are very different. One is the final volume in my Twisted Roads Series. It is intended to be the culmination of the series. I am striving for some resolution for the major characters whom my readers have followed through the first three books. That book is the one that feels stuck. It needs attention. Actually both need attention, but I find in my off-hours, my non-writing time, it is the second book I am thinking about.

Book number two is a new project for me, something completely different from my past work. Maybe that is why I am more excited about it. This second book is a work of historical fiction, based loosely on my paternal ancestors. They were Russian Jewish immigrants who came to America in the early 1890s. So I find myself researching not only my personal family history but the times in which they lived. All that research is a huge challenge, but a fascinating one. I have become something of a historian in the process and I have learned a few things about my own family as well.

It turns out to be much easier to learn about the history of the Russian Empire than it is to learn about the history of the Backalenicks. That personal research feels more like groping my way around a pitch black room. None of my living relatives were part of the original immigrant group, those who actually made the trip, nor are any of the generation that followed still alive. There are a few family stories that are helpful here and there, but not much. And there are spotty records of some long-dead Ellis Island arrivals and no records that I can find of my ancestors who arrived before Ellis Island was established in January of 1892. So my early family story is largely guesswork and I cannot use any real names because it is not their actual story. So I soldier on, making up what I don't know about my ancestors and then placing them in historically accurate circumstances.

But back to my original question: Why is it difficult for me to write more than one book at a time? My conclusion here, as always, is write what you are passionate about. And these days, my heart, my attention, is on book number two. That's the one I care about now. I'm not sure it is possible to feel equally strongly about two books at the same time. It is a question of love. Who can love two people, two projects, two anythings, equally? So I have decided to focus on the book I care most about. I'll keep the other one in abeyance and return to it only if I get stuck or otherwise need a break from the book I most want to write.