

The New Year, My Ohio Series and the Hero's Journey

[By Holly Lisle](#)

The Crash

The new year is just an arbitrary date – not a real thing, not something that can change your life. If you're in a Western European-derived country, then you use the Western calendar. In which [Pope Gregory XIII built a new calendar to update the Julian calendar \(which had an issue with equinoxes\)](#), and western Europe (and by extension, the US) adopted the calendar...

But the truth is that years and months and days and hours and minutes are arbitrary measurements, [best guesses by a multitude of civilizations all over the world](#) at marking time using different methods, usually outside the measurement of the speed of atomic decay of hydrogen or cesium atoms.

January 1st is a roll of the dice. The first day of the “new year” could be on the first day of spring, the summer equinox, the winter equinox, the date of the birth of the favorite person of the guy with enough power to memorialize that date for the life of that civilization...

Point is, the day itself...? Just. Doesn't. Matter.

It's one more wake-up call in a lifetime that you hope will be long, and that you hope will be good, and meaningful, and full of joy and excitement (of the right kind).

But humans in general seem to like to take stock. To look back at where they've been, to look forward to where they might want to go... and to see where they are.

That taking stock, for me, did not happen on December 31st, or on January 1st this year.

It happened when, after MONTHS on a revision that would in most cases would have just take me a couple of weeks, on Monday, January 6th, I crashed the novel *Dead Man's Party* into a ten-ton block of iron at about a thousand miles per hour.

It happened I came face to face with the true nature of the villain I'd built, and realized that day that while he was perfect for the role he held, and absolutely true and right for the story, *I could not write him*. And I could not remove him – he was perfect for the role, perfect for the book. He was simply the wrong character for me. I could not write him and find any joy in the writing.

It was a true dark night of the soul, and I was stunned by my vehement reaction to the story *Dead Man's Party* was becoming.

I stalled, froze, locked up.

Matt kicked me out of that locked-up, shut-down state by asking me, “Why are you doing this to yourself? The Ohio Novel has been sitting on your hard drive for six months? Why don't you work on that?”

And my daughter Becca said, “Why don't you take a think week? Figure out what you need to do?”

The Think Week

I took a [Bill-Gates-style Think Week](#), (in-house, no vacation) in which my theme was simply to define what I wanted my writing career to be. The last decade, it has been heavily non-fiction, but last year I wrote three first-draft novels while also writing the massive [How to Write a Novel class](#), and realized that I am burned all the hell out on nonfiction, and that I want to take a run at making my fiction my full-time job again, this time as an indie, and to use THAT experience

to build the support of my non-fiction classes around the fact that I'm a full-time pro **indie** fiction writer.

Walk the indie walk, in other words, and not have the majority of my credibility come from the thirty-some commercially published novels – because going commercial is simply not the best choice for most novelists.

And while I took my think week, and decided to pass *Dead Man's Party* on to my son Mark, I revised my first Ohio novel. Start to finish, read-through AND write-in. In three days. My previous personal best for an author's revision (as opposed to an editor's request for revisions, which usually takes a week, best case) is about two weeks. And that was grinding.

I did not experience a single moment of grinding on this, a single spot where I didn't know what to fix or how to fix it. And I loved the book on the read through, and loved it even more on the write in.

Three days is by far is the fastest I have EVER revised a full-length novel.

Doing that revision, I realized a couple of things.

The Ohio Series is what I want to be writing through at least five books.

To do them well, I need to do them exclusively, and stay deeply embedded in that world.

So between Monday, January 13th and today, I have been building the overall themes of the Ohio Series (it won't be called that when it goes on sale, but it's going to have to be Amazon exclusive when it launches, and I want to do either a three-book or five-book monthly release of the novels, which means I'm throwing everything I have into this.

The Ohio Series

I built a Hero's Journey type-in revision outline for the first Ohio novel, and Hero's Journey outlines for the other four books in the series – books 3 through 5 this morning.

I'll now transfer the Book 1 HJO (Hero's Journey Outline) to my Scrivener chapter notes, and do the type-in revision from the manuscript. Put the Book 2 HJO into the notes of the next novel manuscript, and start writing that one. Revise.

Write the third. Decide if the end of the midpoint novel of the series is a good place to put everything that I have on sale... OR wait until I have all five done.

I'll be updating [How to Revise Your Novel](#) during this process, and will no doubt have some nice examples of my accelerated process to bring to the class update... but that's going to have to be in small steps, and will not be done at the blinding one-lesson-per-week pace I maintained while building of *How to Write a Novel*.

At this point, I revert to being a novelist first. And that means fiction first, and lots of it. My first two hours of the morning, Monday through Thursday. More if I can streamline my schedule.

So... to sum up...

Things are changing. And I'm glad.

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First snow in 30 years, and huge strides on the Dead Man's Party revision

[By Holly Lisle](#)

We knew yesterday there would be snow today.

I made Matt promise to get me up when it started – and around 4AM, the snow began. (He was editing someone's novel at the time, and he does that best when the house is quiet and he has it to himself.)

So he came and got me, and got the kid, who's 22, but had never seen snow.

And all three of us went out onto the front porch in the cold, just wearing our inside clothes, and for a few minutes we let the cold and the snow bite into us and bring us the ultimate expression of this season that was brand new to Joe, and which had been lost to me for the last thirty years.

We had one snow in North Carolina when the two older kids were little, and I took them outside in that so we could build snowmen and I could drag them around the street on a sled we only ever got to use that once.

So. Snow. We haz it, and I'm happy.

Got a TON done on the revision of Dead Man's Party this morning (working four straight hours because you lose track of the time will do that for you).

Some pieces of the beginning of the story connected for me, and made what's going to be the new middle a helluva lot darker.

The world itself is pulling in tighter – fitting together better. I love this book in spite of the fact that it keeps trying to turn into a series on me.

Dead Man's Party is and needs to be a one-off. It doesn't fit into my Ohio universe, and it doesn't need to leak into its own larger world.

But I do love the damn thing, in spite of its expansionist tendencies.

So... with fiction done for today, and having gone WAY beyond my planned page count, now I'm starting into wrapping up the upgrade of Lesson 1 of HTRYN.

It's taking longer than anticipated. But that happens to, and the final class will be worth the extra effort.

Onward then, while happily at home with snow.

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So now I'm 59

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I turned 59 yesterday. As you get older, your birthday goes from being the high point of your year to something you give a wary sidelong glance as it whips by.

You back away a little. Birthdays start reminding you of all the people who aren't around anymore to celebrate them with you – grandparents and parents and siblings and friends.

So to have an amazing birthday – that's an unexpected grace note in your life, something you don't expect anymore.

My amazing birthday started when Matt and I walked a tiny distance to a local bakery in our new town and bought a bunch of very NOT keto celebratory stuff.

Then we drove to Gnadenhutten, where I showed Matt and Joe the three houses I'd lived in when I lived there – one on Cherry Street when I was three or four, one on Spring Street when I was five to six, and one on Tuscarawas Avenue when I was seven (before we moved to Alaska).

Showed them my school, which was the elementary and high school when I lived there, but which is now apparently just the high school.

Finding places you lived when you were very small is challenging – but while Gnadenhutten has gotten a bit bigger (and is still a lovely town), I was able to locate both the Spring Street and Tuscarawas Avenue houses.

The one on Cherry Avenue is kind of iffy, because I was around three or four when I lived there, and I remember the place only because the lady who lived downstairs from us (and from whom my parents rented the upstairs) had these gorgeous tucked red velvet pillows that she would let me touch when I went to visit.

And because that house was the place where I got my mouth washed out with soap when my rideable Yogi Bear threw me to the sidewalk, and I loudly called him a goddamned bear.



I have tended to wax philosophical in some of my past birthday posts. And I don't do them that often, because birthdays when you're an adult are usually just another day.

But here's the thing...

Yeah, I'm getting older, and getting older carries with it the sure knowledge that you're pushing toward an ending, and you'd prefer that to remain a long damn way in the future.

But at 59, I'm down a minimum of a hundred pounds and a max of around a hundred thirty from the most I ever weighed. I stopped weighing myself when I hit 231, but I kept gaining weight while increasing another whole WalMart X size. So I don't know exactly how much weight I've lost. I know it's a lot.

My blood pressure, blood glucose, and overall health are superb.

I no longer have a parathyroid tumor, and am still clear of tongue cancer. We'll ignore the fact that I have a cold today.

And I now live in Ohio.

As you get older, birthdays stop feeling all that special. But this one – this one was spectacular.

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Home in Ohio – We made it.

[By Holly Lisle](#)

The last time I posted, we were in the middle of hanging hurricane shutters with Hurricane Dorian on its way in.

Since then, we:

- Bought a house in Ohio
- Sold our place in South Florida
- Packed our stuff into a Pod (BIG shout-out to the folks at Pods.com, who totally kicked ass from beginning to end)
- Moved our shit from the Way Deep South to the Hilly North
- Painted, unpacked, put things places

And I am home to stay after thirty-nine (almost forty, by just a couple of weeks) long, Ohioless years.

The town I moved back to, and the people who live here, are as I remembered them (and I last lived in this particular town 46 years ago).

There was a lot of crazy in this particular move. We didn't come back here to scope out the area first. Didn't see anything of the house (and a bunch of other houses) but pictures the real estate agent (Amy Otto, who was AMAZING) took for us.

We moved here based on my deep love of this state, of this town, and very old memories that never let go of me.

And we were right to make the leap, crazy as it admittedly was.

My memory was good.

And home – in our weird, quirky house, in the hills and the town and these people – was waiting when we got here.

I love this place. I love the roll and rise of the ground, the curve of the river, the trees I still remember from childhood, the smell of the air in the morning, the lay of the light in the afternoon, the quiet, the old houses still lived in and loved and kept up in a place where old things deserve a bit of reverence, and the kindness of strangers.

And the fact is that a helluva long time after I got dragged away from here against my will and my vehement protests, I fit here as I have never fit anywhere else.

These are my people, this is my place.

I'm home.

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