

The Ghost Who'll Be Coming to Ohio

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

The text message at the top of this post (which I sent to Matt at 3:34 AM on 12/6/20) includes the date and time because my half-sister, Julie, died in 2016, before her birthday, which was December 3rd.

I got the news of her death from my older son, Mark, who called Matt while we were sitting in a Pancake House in South Florida.

Mark had received the news from his grandmother, my first ex-mother-in-law, who'd been told by my mother, who was the bitch who didn't even let me know my sister was sick. "Mom" (said with the sort of sneer that inserts your favorite epithet in its place) just waited for Julie to die before passing on the news, and in her spectacularly cowardly fashion, sending it by third-hand sources.

That's "Mom's" style – waiting for folks to die, so that she can gloat over the knowledge, punishing me because after my son came to me to tell me about being molested by his father, Mom called him a liar – and me too. And I told her I that she and I were done.

My ex was found guilty, and convicted, and sentenced, by the way.

So both my sister's and my father's deaths have been third-hand news and both discovered way after the fact...

But you're never as done with the trash in your life as you

might hope.

The funny thing is, when the Bitch Queen croaks, I'll never know. I'm remarkably okay with that.

But in any case, my sister's birthday was December 3rd. She would have been fifty-six this year, and I'd celebrated her birthday privately. And I'd been thinking about her.

And in one of those weird, disorienting dreams, on December 6th, I dreamed that I was fifteen again, that she and I were in the horrible torture-device fold-out couch in the sunroom of our single-wide trailer, which, in the manner of most sunrooms, didn't have any walls between it and the room next to it. In that trailer, the kitchen/dining room was there.

In my dream, Julie was on the right side of the fold-out bed (her spot) and sound asleep, while I was awake on the left. I'd dreamed that she stole the covers and kicked me – she was a magnificent blanket-stealer and kicked like a mule, and it was her kick that woke me up.

And I reached over to grab the covers, and she wasn't there.

So I grabbed my phone and texted Matt (who was awake and downstairs): "What happened to Julie? She was here..."

And he didn't text me back. He just came upstairs, looked in at me, and said, "Are you okay?"

And first I remembered that I wasn't fifteen. Not asleep in a single-wide trailer in the trailer park above Beaver Creek State Park. Married, with kids. With a husband who at that moment was looking in on me with slightly unsettled bemusement.

I said, "Oh."

But following right on that first realization, I remembered that Julie was dead. It came as a hard, mean shock, because

just a second before, I'd been fifteen and she'd been right there with me and had kicked me awake while stealing the covers yet again.

And I said, "OH!" And my throat tightened up and for a couple minutes it got hard to breathe.

And that would have been it – weird dream, disturbing and disorienting but totally explicable – except for this morning.

When I woke up realizing that my main character in the Ohio Novels also has a half-sister. It was just a line in passing in the revision of Book 1, and I'd never planned to use the sister character.

This morning however, I realized that while my bitch of a mother made sure I never got to say goodbye to Julie, I don't have to. Not entirely. A part of my memory of her can live on in fiction.

My main character's sister is going to become part of the Ohio series. I probably won't name her Julie. But she'll be dark-haired, blue-eyed, and not look even remotely like her half-sister. Or her mother.

Just like Julie and me. Unlike Julie, the fictional sister won't have been born with cerebral palsy or mental retardation, so she'll get to do all the cool shit Julie never got to do in real life.

And in my own way, I'll get to say goodbye.

Related links:

1. <https://hollylisle.com/into-the-new-year-words-for-2017/>
Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

Trusting your characters to surprise you: 1400 words from Friday, reported a day late

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

Writing yesterday went really well. I hit this awesome surprise, where one of my characters suddenly did something perfectly unexpected, showing up at my main character's house with a cell phone video showing the impossible in action.

It was exactly the weird and twisty wonderfulness that thrilled me, and made me laugh, and at the same time made chills run down my spine, because it makes the situation my main character is in so much worse.

After the writing, however, my day took a sideways turn, and I didn't have the chance to blog.

So I don't have a spiffy picture of yesterday's daily progress.

But I did get the words, and I cannot wait until Monday to get back to them. I will wait, because part of the process is religiously observing the two days off that let my subconscious mind refill.

I'm refilling.

So enjoy your weekend. I intend to. ☐

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

Better and better – Ohio Novel 2 and 2377 words

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

I woke up this morning knowing how Ohio #2 needed to end. And today I jumped to all the way to Chapter 25, five chapters from the planned last Chapter 30, and started writing the necessary stuff to get the story to that ending. Tomorrow, I may drop back to chapter 12, and then write toward today's work on the beginning of the ending.

Or I might write from 25 all the way to the end, and then go back and pick up the middle – though that path in the past has led to a certain amount of tinkering with middles and endings and even beginnings to get things right in the final draft.

Either way though, with the exception of choose-your-own-adventure novels, readers read fiction linearly.

And most of the time, I more or less write it that way.

This book is coming at me from a lot of directions at once

But it is, by God, coming.

I wrote 2377 words this morning – way more than I'd planned – and I wouldn't have even stopped except I have other listed in my bullet journal that must be accomplished today.

Writing was delightful, though. I built in a good, solid hunk of action tied to a bit of a mystery – and I pretty much know how that bit of mystery ends. I could write it tomorrow.

Maybe.

Then I could use that bit to write the ending, and introduce the issue that I now think is going to set up Ohio #3.

But I might let what I know and have on the page sit and age for a bit now, and go back to the empty Chapter 13, and follow up with what I wrote yesterday.

Either way, I win.

Usually I don't know the ending until I write it. This happens for me with a lot of novels, but most spectacularly with third novel of the Secret Texts trilogy, where I had no clue at all how the thing was going to end until my right brain started pouring its surprise ending out as my fingers were moving... and that turned out to be my dream ending.

This wasn't a dream. This was more like having a brick of fiction attached to a happy tiger cub dropped onto my head from Santa in a sleigh.

The fiction brick was nothing like what I expected. I'll have to find a good home for the tiger... and while it's with me, it might leave some messes in the book as I get to the finish line.

I didn't even believe in Santa until the bugger present-bombed me.

And the results so far have made for a pretty good surprise.

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

Pretty good day – Ohio Novel #2 Progress

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

This morning, I increased my daily word-count goal to 1500 (up from 1250). This was a small change, and I'd been hitting that number pretty regularly anyway. So I decided to make it my regular objective.

I came in just above that with 1532 words for the day.

Have a nice situation going on with my main character and one of my favorite protagonists who is in deep trouble, and with a handful of folks who have gathered to figure out how they might help.

I like what I got, and this has left me in a good position from which to pick up words tomorrow. (Characters are still in trouble, and there's some conflict about how it might be solved.)

Now I'm off to write the next Thursday Tip, my free weekly email for fiction writers, and after that, I have a longish stack of other things on my bullet journal to get done.

It was, however, a good writing day – and my focus on a reasonable word count, and on doing fiction first, is making me very happy.

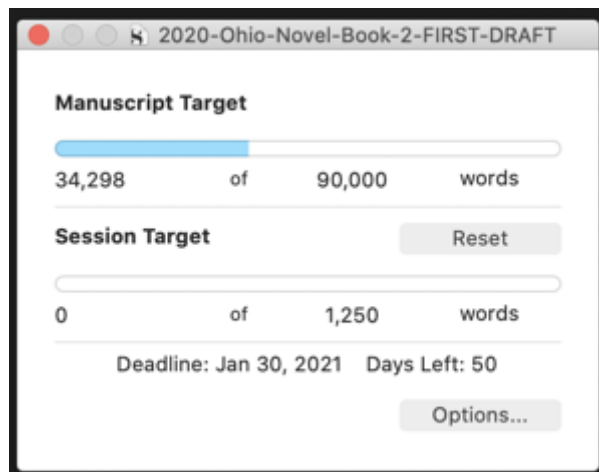
Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

Seven. But close to done.

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

At the moment, I don't have much more to say than that. If I can get this last hill of shit shoveled, I will then be able to get some actual words today.

If I get to my fiction before I run out of working hours, I'll be starting at 34,298 words, with a writing goal of 1250 or better – but if I get to work on the book at all today, and don't hit my wordcount, just getting to write some fiction



will be a win.

Here's hoping. AND working.

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

Help I didn't ask for... a long

slog ahead to fix what a “helpful” company irreversibly broke

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

Oh, irony.

Two days ago, I think, “Gee... the writing is going really well, I miss blogging, and I would love to blog about writing fiction again.”

Two days ago, after a middle-of-the-road-but-not-bad day of getting my words – I have fun, I like the words I get, and I get enough of them to move the story forward and to add some pretty spiffy complications – some nameless jackass at some nameless company decides that said jackass can make some changes to my basic NONWRITING work process that will make my life better by breaking the way I do damn near everything I do.

I can either put my faith in this awesome company [THAT’S IRONY] which – having once completely broken my still-unfixed daily work – has proven that although it might NOT break my process again, it could. At any time.

I can say, “Yeah, sure. I’ll take that chance.”

Or I can change my process, not depend on the help of that company or any other company like it, and make sure I control this particular mission-critical task from end to end.

EASY DECISION: Wherever it’s possible, you don’t give other folks the power to wreck your work.

OUTCOME: I have to figure out how to control the process from end to end.

So yesterday I worked from 6 a.m., when I started work and discovered I couldn't work on anything else until I fixed this, to not long after 6 p.m., when my eyes were crossed and I didn't dare keep going.

And my accomplishment can be summed up in a single number.

3

This is an objective number that defines what I accomplished yesterday, encompassing 12 hours of straight work, one cup of coffee, and one bathroom break. This is not 3 out of some knowable bigger number, because I have no way of telling what the end number could be. I could be 6. It could be 60. It could be worse than that.

It is, however, an objective number of what I've completed in a finite but very large task.

BECAUSE... if I can't get words, I can damnwell stick with my decision to get back to blogging, so that when I can get back to fiction, the blog will attest that I did not just forget. I did not lie down. I did not make excuses.

So that, when I can get back to the words, I will have the reminder of what broke them for however long this takes, and the reminder of how important it is to keep your mission-critical processes in your own hands.

Three. At the end of today there will be another number. At the end of tomorrow, there will be one after that. And so on, until this is fixed.

'Nuff said. Onward.

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved

The Ohio Novel #1 Is Done! (Or what it's like to disappear into a black box)

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
By Holly Lisle

I wrapped up my final draft yesterday.

In spite of best efforts, I came in over my 90,000K wordcount by about 12,000 words.

I don't have a title for the novel yet (Matt comes up with my best titles, and I'm really hoping he can pull out something amazing, both for the first book and for the entire series).

I do have my pseudonym. I can't give either until – BARE MINIMUM – the first five books are out and starting to find their audience.

And then I'll only be giving it to the folks on my mailing list who are genuinely interested in the genre.

Since I'm publishing the Ohio series independently, since I'm bringing the series and world (with possible subsequent series) out under a pseudonym, and since I have to plot the next four novels, then have to complete the entire 5-book series – have all five written, revised, edited, bug-hunted, formatted, covered with pro-quality covers, and get them all up into Amazon-exclusive KDP and print formats, and then launch them at the speed of one book a month for five months, I have a long, long way to go.

But... THIS TIME, I'm trying to work with Amazon's algorithms, and see what I can learn from doing that.

It's an investment in manpower. A BIG one – primarily but not exclusively mine. We're talking the time, effort, focus, dedication, that goes into thinking and then writing 400,000+ MORE connected, related, compelling words of fiction that must be outlined, first-drafted, finished, revised, edited, bug-hunted, typeset, put into Kindle, print, and other formats (the Ohio novels will start Amazon-exclusive, but probably won't stay that way past the completion of the initial five-book launch) have cover copy written and tested and re-written, have title testing – so I'm talking about an all-in commitment of a big chunk of my life, with no feedback (except from Matt, Becky, and my bug hunters) until this whole thing goes live.

It's also an investment in money: All mine. Just the cash outlay for five great, professional covers, is significant. But much, much more expensive than that is opportunity cost – the things I don't get paid for because of the time and effort I'm putting into this project that I *hope* I might get paid for... that isn't a new writing class or a couple of classes I KNOW I could get paid for.

If it goes big for me, THEN my writing students will get my numbers and how I did it, along with this really cool story development process I've come up with and am using for these. Maybe some workshops.

If it doesn't go big for me, they'll get the really cool story development process... but that's not a cool new workshop that might be able to give writers willing to do the work (as outlined above, so we're talking BRAVE writers) a path to building a live-on fiction income. The story development thing is just a few lessons. Probably added into an existing class or two.

And here's the thing that's making me a little nuts.

The entire process has to be done completely in the dark. I have to build EVERYTHING, pay for EVERYTHING, set up EVERYTHING, write EVERYTHING, and publish EVERYTHING... with nobody but Matt, Becky, and myself seeing what I'm doing. (Well, at the point where I'm ready for bug-hunters, I already have a couple lined up, and will bring in a few more, and this handful of readers will go through all five novels back to back to back. And sign an NDA beforehand that they can't tell anyone who I am, or what my pseudonym is, or where the website is, or anything. Not until the books are doing so well that I can bring in my other genre-related fiction to the new writer under a "written as Holly Lisle" label with the pseudonym as the author name.

I can't share snippets of any of the Ohio stuff – not snippets or scenes or teaser stuff or worldbuilding – on my blog, on the podcast, in the writing community forum. Nothing.

I can't put links to the books when they come out here or in the writing community or on the podcast page.

I can't link my old novels to this new set.

I have to become invisible.

Not my strong suit.

But for this test to mean anything, for this process to mean anything, this is where I am.

At some point in the future, I hope to be able to share some crazy great news. Or at least, "Hey, I'm making enough to pay off the house." That would be really cool.

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

written by Holly
December 29, 2020
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.

Contents © Holly Lisle. <https://hollylisle.com> All Rights Reserved