

Excerpt From

# Story Ideas -- Inside Your Newspaper

By Deb Gallardo

## A Blank Page, A Blank Stare

There's nothing worse for an author or an aspiring writer.

You're all geared up to start writing. You sharpen pencils or get out your favorite pen. You pull out a brand new legal pad or a fresh sheet of notebook paper. Or you fire up your computer and open your word processing program to a new document.

Regardless of what tools you use to record your most profound or funniest thoughts, the fact is, when no thoughts are forthcoming -- profound, funny or otherwise -- the blank page transforms into a thing of dread - a monster that rears its ugly head.

Truth to tell, every poem, story, novel or script starts with a blank page. Not every writer, however, is bothered by endless white space. To those able to see beyond the fear and the intensity of the moment, it's a fresh, new canvas with infinite potential.

But -- writers have this positive perspective only if ideas are bubbling just beneath the surface of their imagination. Without inspiration, the blank page is less a monster and more a void -- a vast wasteland for which there is neither map nor hope of survival.

The good news is . . . anyone, including YOU, can easily overcome a lack of inspiration. This book will show you how to find yours.

Where do published authors get inspiration? It doesn't help to hear writers say, "Ideas are everywhere!" Where can *you* find story ideas every single time you need them? That's what you want to know! Here are a few possibilities:

- Some writers lurk in their favorite **online forums**, scouting for hot topics. Whatever people are discussing or arguing about is sure to find an audience, at least in that niche.
- Other writers scan **local television listings** for summaries of movies and series episodes.
- Still other writers watch **daytime dramas** for their abundance of multiple storylines. (At least they say it's only for research....)
- And then there's **the newspaper**, the subject of this ebook.

I'm going to make a prediction here. By the time we're finished, you'll be saying, "Story ideas really *are* everywhere!" Truly, it's just a matter of practice.

But perhaps you're not convinced this will work for you. Fair enough. Well, consider this.

Have you ever bought a car and suddenly notice the same make and model everywhere? You wonder where they all came from because you don't recall noticing them before now. The truth is, they've been there for some time now. So what changed?

*You* did. Because your focus changed.

It's the same thing with story ideas. Once you know how and where to look, you'll see story potential everywhere. In fact, you probably won't be able to NOT see ideas!

And it all starts here with 6 little words:

## **Who, What, When, Where, Why and How**

You probably learned about these six story components all the way back in the fifth grade. It doesn't matter if you're writing fiction or non-fiction. **Without these six pieces, there is no story.**

It was so back when stories were oral tradition. It was so when humans

began writing down tales, and at the advent of the printing press, not to mention the invention of word processors. Furthermore, there's no sign that this will change in the future.

Regardless of whether or not stories are spun in cyber space or in two-dimensional electronic books, or by some other means not yet invented, inquiring minds really want to know the answers to these six questions.

The point of this book, then, is to teach you how YOU -- yes, little ol' you, all on your lonesome -- can use a newspaper to answer these six burning questions time after time to:

- Find story ideas that spark your interest when your “idea well” has gone dry, and
- Flesh out character, plot and motivation

The steps we use here are as much for beginners as they are for authors whose books have hit number one at Amazon.com or on the New York Times' Bestseller List. Hey, when it works, it works!

Keep reading and you'll see firsthand how this system works, as I walk you through the process I personally use to generate story sparks. We begin, appropriately, with a story.

Stories can weave a spell around us, transport us to another time and place, and create a believable milieu from sheer fantasy.

This is my story.

### **The Humble Classified Ad**

It was a tiny, unobtrusive advertisement. Ordinarily I wouldn't have given it a second glance. But something in this one particular newspaper entry caught and then held my attention.

I don't even remember why I was scanning the classifieds that day. The paper was a local weekly publication -- not your Washington Post or New York Times. Probably I was expecting my dream job ad to miraculously appear as if written just for me. (What can I say? I was heavily into fantasy back then.)

But for some reason that I can't explain to this day, except that "it was meant to be," my eyes were drawn to the advertisement below, listed under MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE:

*"Wedding Dress sz 22 never worn. Call Lucy (XXX-XXX-XXXX)."*

What is so puzzling about why I noticed the ad to begin with is that I wasn't in the market for a wedding gown. After reading through the ad twice, a thrill of recognition inexplicably shivering up and down my spine, I tore out the ad and put it someplace "safe."

If you're as organizationally challenged as I am, you'll understand that this meant it went into a pile of sticky notes, old envelopes and paper napkins, all with semi-important scribblings thereon, which I stored in a little basket on my computer desk.

As such things go in my life, once I'd taken definitive action (i.e. - "filing" it away), I promptly forgot about the ad. Then one day I was pawing through that little basket. By then it needed to be replaced by a larger one, as the contents were threatening to spill onto the desk and subsequently onto the floor.

I was searching for a phone number that I was sure I'd saved. But what I came across first was a tiny, ragged-edged, beginning-to-yellow piece of newsprint. I can't recall if I ever located what had sent me on this particular quest, but then going through that little basket was sometimes like being on a treasure hunt. The search was the most important part of the process!

The clipping had been nearly torn in half, so I almost threw it away because I read the wrong side at first. Now, I may be disorganized, but I'm not stupid. I checked the other side of the clipping (impressed with my unflinching logic?), and there it was, the wedding dress ad I'd torn out so long ago and forgotten.

Once again the wording pulled at me -- a distinctly emotional tug. Did you feel it, too? Read it again to see if you have a similar experience.

*"Wedding Dress sz 22 never worn. Call Lucy (XXX-XXX-XXXX)."*

See what I mean? I was more than curious. I was intrigued. It was as though someone had opened a window into a stranger's life, tantalizing me with just enough information to get me involved. It was the phrase “never worn” that really gripped me.

Think about this. Isn't there something inherently poignant about a wedding that didn't happen? It implies at least one broken heart, and maybe shattered dreams.

How many reasons could there be for why the wedding gown was never worn? I started asking myself “why?” and right away possible answers tumbled out of my brain.

Was it because Lucy was a size 22 and her fiancé ditched her? Unfortunately, this is most people's first assumption, which makes the idea an outright cliché. In writing, we avoid clichés “like the plague” -- unless we're using them deliberately to make a point. I'm sure you got mine.

Okay outside-the-box thinking needed here. Maybe Lucy dumped the fiancé! “Go, girl!” Or perhaps the response should be, “He's better off without her!” It depends on the two people, don't you see?

This thought led me to wondering why she might have dumped him. Was it because he was cheating on her? Oops, another cliché. Overweight woman's fiancé has affair with someone thin and prettier -- a likely scenario, yes, but overdone. A better idea would be if she dumped him because she wasn't ready to commit.

Then came a tragic thought. I'd assumed Lucy owned the wedding gown. What if Lucy were only selling the dress because the bride-to-be died? How did she die? Had she been ill? Had she valiantly struggled to stay alive long enough to go through with the wedding, only to lose her fight against time?

Had she been killed in an accident? Perhaps she and her fiancé had been arguing right before the crash. Was it one of those freak accidents that couldn't have been prevented? Was someone close to them a witness to the accident? Or the CAUSE of the accident?

Or did the bride-to-be commit suicide because she despaired of living? Had her intended called off the wedding? She didn't think she was good enough?

She couldn't go through with marrying a man who has started to treat her badly, just the same as her father had done?

Could she have died of a broken heart? Because she was jilted? Because her fiancé died?

What if she'd been murdered? What if a former boyfriend had been so jealous when he learned she was engaged that he killed her and her fiancé? "If I can't have her, no one can!"

Then again, maybe she didn't die. If a mean little schemer, perhaps Lucy's roommate, were secretly obsessed with the fiancé, she might have run the ad to hurt and humiliate Lucy. Let's say Lucy was really a size 2 or a 12. She'd discussed the possibility of calling off the wedding with her roommate. The schemer could say she's sorry, but she thought Lucy wanted to sell the dress, and it was just a typographical error at the newspaper.

Okay, so that one's a little thin (pardon the expression).

What if Lucy lost weight and has bought a much smaller wedding dress? How did she do it? Did she jump on the lo-carb bandwagon, have a bariatric bypass, starve herself silly, exercise it off? Will she keep it off?

What was her sudden motivation for losing weight *after* she had bought a wedding gown? To please her fiancé or to please herself? Did she have a moment of clarity in which she set out with unprecedented enthusiasm, drive and inspiration to tackle this out-of-control area of her life?

Or what if . . . ?

Are you starting to get how this works? Let's recap.

1. Bride-to-be jilted by fiancé who wants thinner bride
2. Bride-to-be jilts NON-cheating fiancé because she's not ready to commit
3. Bride-to-be jilts cheating fiancé
4. Bride-to-be dies after protracted illness just before wedding
5. Bride-to-be dies in auto accident and fiancé blames himself
6. Bride-to-be and fiancé both die in auto accident caused by an argument
7. Bride-to-be dies in freak accident that messes up fiancé's mind for

awhile because it seems so senseless

8. Bride-to-be dies in accident witnessed by family member / close friend
9. Bride-to-be dies in accident caused by family member / close friend
10. Bride-to-be commits suicide after fiancé dumps her
11. Bride-to-be despairs of living because she thinks she's not good enough for her fiancé
12. Bride-to-be can't face the same abuse she received from her father
13. Bride-to-be dies of broken heart when fiancé dumps her
14. Bride-to-be dies of broken heart when fiancé dies
15. Bride-to-be and fiancé murdered by jealous ex-boyfriend
16. Jealous roommate publicly humiliates bride-to-be who is a size 2, NOT size 22
17. Bride-to-be is tiny now and no longer needs a wedding dress 3 times her size

These 17 ideas came from a nine-word ad without my working hard at all. The questions all came quickly to mind, just out of natural curiosity. Writers have an abundance of curiosity about all kinds of subjects. Don't stifle that part of your personality. Nurture it!

**For the rest of the ebook, you'll need to purchase it at <http://www.findstoryideas.com/>**