

Wordsmithing

By William C Morris

Remember, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” or “Call me Ishmael.”? How about, “I had this tale from one who had no right to tell it.”? Even, “It was a dark and stormy night” achieved some recognition as a noted first line. Words evoke images, fears and hopes and can leave an indelible mark on those who read them. A novel that begins with, “Once upon a time there was a Martian named Valentine Michael Smith.” changed my life and the lives of thousands of people and continues to have a profound effect half a century after being published. And who can forget, “In a hole in the ground, there lived a Hobbit.”? These were more than writers – they were Wordsmiths. Like the legendary Japanese sword maker, Muramasa, his blades outlive the blacksmith who forged them. The works these Wordsmiths hammered and forged live on long after their mortal lives ended.

When I grow up, I wanna be like them!

While going through some old papers some time ago, I came across a collection of old report cards from elementary through high school. Paraphrasing what was on almost every one of them, they read, “William could be a much better student if only he didn’t daydream so much.”

Being bored in school is nothing new, but rather than act out, I retreated inside my head where I made up stories in which I was the hero. Always a voracious reader, my first attempt at a novel was when I was ten. It was called “Wild Apache!” It concerned a ten-year-old boy (surprise) who got a pinto pony for his birthday. Alas, it remains unfinished. My parents didn’t get the hint and buy me a pony, either.

A seminal event in my life occurred when I was seventeen. Along with my friend, Andris, I attended the World Science Fiction Convention in St. Louis, Missouri over Labor Day weekend. There I encountered many of my favorite writers – in person - as well as hundreds of wannabes. These “Giants” of Science Fiction and Fantasy turned out to be mostly human and amazingly accessible. For the first time in my life I didn’t feel out of place. There were hundreds and thousands of people just as weird as I was.

So, I said to myself, “Self, if these people can write, why can’t you?” Of course, the answer to that was I was but seventeen and had little or no life experience to draw from. That didn’t stop me from writing, though. Poems, songs and short stories flowed from my pen and typewriter, all pretty bad. Fortunately, none have survived the ravages of time.

But as I got older, I got better. I read books on writing. I let better writers critique my work. I occasionally got published. I even got paid a couple of times, which made me a Professional Writer. Sure, there were dry spells. Still are. But I am still driven to write.

Why, you ask? Well, you didn’t really but I’m going to tell you anyway. I like to make people laugh. I like to make people think. I love to entertain. If someone reads one of my

novels in fifty or 100 years, I will have achieved some measure of immortality. Over two decades ago, one article I wrote – only a few paragraphs long - was published in a niche magazine. A few years later, a woman who read it told me it affected her profoundly and changed how she looked at Love. I wasn't paid for that article, but her words rewarded me in a way that was far better than gold.

One day, I hope to achieve that effect with one of my novels and acquire some gold, too.

The concept for a book or a story or poem is like the raw iron. We heat it, hammer it, shape it, quench it and then do it all over again. And again! And again! A Muramasa katana is hammered flat, then folded over and hammered flat again. And again! And again! When finished, it has over one million layers. With hard work, we writers eventually get the shape and the steel the way we want it. Then we have to sharpen it. Finally, we have to polish it!

I am a writer. I hope, one day, to be a Wordsmith.