

The Hidden Benefits of NaNoWriMo
an Interview with Shannon Monroe
by Vanessa Kier

San Francisco Area RWA member Shannon Monroe is a veteran of National Novel Writing Month, aka NaNoWriMo, when writers pledge to write 50,000 words during November. As a precursor to the start of this year's event, I asked her to talk a bit about her experience.

How did you first hear about NaNoWriMo?

I recall hearing about it at one of our SFA-RWA meetings from a fellow chapter member who had done it before and won. And the fact that the folks who started it were from the East Bay just made it better.

What got you interested in doing NaNoWriMo?

The first thing I thought of was could this help me cross the finish line to actually completing a book, writing "The End", so I sat myself down that November and did it.

How many years have you participated?

Each year since 2007; it's in my blood now.

Is it true that you've won every year?

Incredibly enough, yes, I have won each year, but don't jinx me! :)

What would you say are the two key benefits for A) a new writer and B) an established writer?

Well, for a new writer, (for me "new" meaning unpublished in Fiction, but not new to writing), the best thing that came out of it for me was learning that I could actually accomplish something so insane as 50,000 words in 30 days, if I put my mind to it. And if that's your problem, like it was mine, finishing, then this contest is for you. The community you join, and the camaraderie among all the other "Wrimos" or "NaNos", is just phenomenal. It's all positives, no negatives, everyone wants you to win; we're all pulling for each other around the globe. For an established writer, I guess it depends on the definition of established. If you mean someone who's published once or multiple times, then I'd say the benefits of paying it forward, giving back to the writing community that supports your books is key, and connecting through the writers online at nanowrimo.org, will only create more readers for you down the line. A lot of published authors give back with Pep Talks and webinars, etc.

What are the hidden or long-term benefits to participating that you'd like to share with writers?

Same as mentioned above, and in addition, each year you participate, you have a new book to develop and potentially publish down the line if you wish, or not. You can do whatever you want with the stories, it's okay, no one reads it but you. The benefits of knowing you can do it, and the friends you make either in person at write-in sessions or virtually through the resources and forums online are priceless.

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Can you expand a little on the local meet-ups?

Local meet-ups, called "Write Ins", are where participants (Wrimos or NaNos), meet, eat, drink, commiserate, brainstorm and write together throughout the month at various locations worldwide. Once you sign up, you can join your local "Home" region, as well as other locations if you wish, and you will find threads and a calendar of events in your area where you can meet fellow writers for support in getting your word count higher. In addition to the regional threads, there are forums and discussion threads for every kind of writing topic or resource needed such as plotting vs "pantsing", genre threads, reference and research threads, etc.

Is there any down side to participating in NaNoWriMo?

The only thing that may seem like a down side to other people, but not me, is that you may miss out on a lot of events or gatherings, especially because of Thanksgiving, because you're writing every free minute of every day. Personally, I use the holidays in November for writing, I can see my people during the other eleven months of the year! Haha! :)

Is there any other information you'd like to let writers know about NaNoWriMo? Get off your arse and do it!

Note: This year, Shannon will be playing host to four NaNoWriMo write-in sessions on the UC Berkeley campus. Check the NaNoWriMo website www.nanowrimo.org under USA : California: East Bay region for details.

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Shannon L. Monroe is a former San Francisco Area RWA board member, the current UC Berkeley Interlibrary Services Unit Head, a poet, and a novelist. This year will mark her ninth year of participation in NaNoWriMo.

Vanessa Kier writes action-packed romantic thrillers. This is the first year that she'll be participating in NaNoWriMo. Her latest series, WAR, takes place in West Africa, where she lived for a time. When not writing fiction, she writes the occasional *Tech Talk* column for the newsletter of her local chapter of RWA and also writes miscellaneous articles of interest to writers. Her home on the web is: www.vanessakier.com.