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SECOND & FLUME

by **Melissa Daugherty**

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Rebel with a cause

Excuse my absence for a month while I become a full-blown journalism cliché.

In November, inspired by the annual National Novel Writing Month (aka NaNoWriMo), I'm embarking on a sizable writing project. The goal: write a novel-length manuscript (50,000 words) in 30 days.

I'm writing about it here because doing so will help keep me accountable. I'm goal-oriented and deadline-driven, so having a plan is key to the follow-through.

That's where the nonprofit NaNoWriMo comes in. The organization came up with the aforementioned word count and timeline when it was established more than two decades ago. Since then, by providing support through tools and discussion forums on topics such as theme (at no charge), it has helped tens of thousands of would-be authors write a novel, or at least the start of one.

I'm an experienced wordsmith, but that's not a prerequisite. In fact, one of the core ideas is to encourage aspiring writers. Still, it'll be a challenge for me to keep pace.

Between attempting to write an average of roughly 1,600 words per day and my regular duties as a mom, I'll be fairly busy throughout the month. Therefore, it's more than likely I'll be too busy to contribute anything new to the next issue of this beloved publication.

Like many reporter types, I've always harbored a secret desire to write a book. Not the Great American Novel, mind you. I'm not trying to live up to the literary masterpieces, like Harper Lee's moral tale *To Kill a Mockingbird* or John Steinbeck's exploration of poverty and capitalism in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

For now, at least, I'm determined to stay in my lane. My passion lies with creative nonfiction, which basically means narrative writing of factual events. Technically, in terms of NaNoWriMo, this makes me a "rebel," someone who participates in the effort by writing something other than a novel.

As an editor at an alt-weekly for three-quarters of my 20 years in journalism, I know a bit about both rebellion and storytelling. I've especially enjoyed writing a column for the past decade, and it's likely that you'll see a reprint of one that I'm partial to in December.

My favorite subject, of course, is my sweet, disabled son, whom I've written about quite often over the years.

Life with Henry has been an adventure since the day he was born, one that his father and I never expected to go on when we decided to become parents 11 years ago. We've spent countless hours in doctors' offices and hospitals, so much so that I'd have to sit and really think about the number of surgeries he's had in his short life.

The latest was to lengthen the tendons in his left leg, a procedure that is expected to greatly aid his mobility. It took place in early August and Henry has been in two different casts since then, wheelchair-bound for the first eight weeks post-operative. He's scheduled to get his second (and hopefully final) cast off around the time this newspaper hits the racks, and I think I'm more excited than he is.

I've been lugging his clunky wheelchair in and out of my car every day for the past three months, reminding myself that it's a minor inconvenience considering the future benefits. Meanwhile, Henry, who's been stripped of his independence, has lodged nary a complaint. After we explained how the surgery was going to help him, and that having a cast was part of the deal, he quickly accepted his temporary life on wheels.

I'm biased, but the kid is my personal hero. Someday I should write a book about him.

Melissa Daugherty is editor-at-large for the Chico News & Review



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