

## The Multiple Stories Unfold: By Linda Mason

Knowing that I wanted to have a theme to my stories, writing about, for, and from the perspective of children, I knew the most fundamental part of that synergy would revolve around the alphabet. The first thing I did was write down all twenty-six letters of the alphabet.

I wanted my stories to focus on one main character's adventures and experiences, and I wanted to name those stories for each character. I then thought about some of the characteristics and behaviors of children that could be reflected in adjectives that would also start with the letters of those characters' names, and the titles began to unfold: *Anxious Arlene, Busy Benny, Catty Carla, Doubtful Denise, Excited Ernesto, Fearless Freddie, Graceful Gregory, Hopeful Henry*, etc., I also wanted to have names that represented that were ethnically diverse, so then came *Excited Ernesto, Quarrelsome Quanique*, and *Muddy Maria*. Along the way of developing the story lines and actually writing the stories, I ended up adjusting a few of the adjectives preceding the names; however the basic outlines for the stories were completed in about ten minutes. For some reason, I wasn't led to develop the stories in alphabetical order. *Kissing Kirkland* was the first story that came to me.

I sat before my computer with only the title of the story on the page. I bowed my head and asked the Lord to direct my hand to script the scenes of each story. Usually, I would close my eyes to visualize a scene. Once I saw it, I would start typing, with my eyes still closed, until I described the scene before me. As I did, other scenes would unfold and the character's adventures would begin. Every minute or so, I would open my eyes and review what I had written, correcting spelling or punctuation along the way, and then close my eyes again to continue. I wanted to develop a twist in the story, so I thought about how a child might feel going through this experience. I also knew and acknowledged that every child's real-life experience didn't always have a happy ending. I wanted to write an ending that would be reasonable and true to life, but also something a child could learn to live with ... even if it wasn't "happily ever after".

Once I finished each story, I went back to fix the typographical and grammatical errors, which undoubtedly isn't my strong suit. I did some searching and found an old book on punctuation and basic grammatical structure. I

couldn't believe I had forgotten so many rules from my grammar school days – and this was a fifth grade grammar book I was using. Wow. Nonetheless, I edited as much as I could on my own, and then made sure I found someone else more proficient than myself to do the final editing. I found a former school teacher, a family member whose writing skills I greatly admired, and another family member who'd obtained three college degrees. I couldn't lose with this starting line up!

In developing the plot for each story, I didn't always follow the same process. Sometimes, the stories would unfold very quickly. Some of them would flow so fast that I could hardly type fast enough, and then other times, I would sit and stare at the computer screen for minutes on end and nothing would come to me. Occasionally, I would even have to save and close out one unfinished story and just start on another, coming back to the unfinished one weeks later to complete it.

Admittedly, two stories in particular were more challenging to write than the others. *Quarrelsome Quaniqua* and *X-Con Xavier* were the two stories that took me quite a while to complete. *Quarrelsome Quaniqua* was a story dealing with domestic and familial abuse. I know there are some children who have to find ways to navigate through situations like this all the time, and I wanted to address this reality that is too often swept under the rug. I also felt the strong need to tell this story in a way that wouldn't leave readers, especially children, feeling hopeless. It was a difficult feat, both telling a story that is often hard to verbalize, but also acknowledge the strength and courage it takes to face those difficult moments. In *X-Con Xavier*, I was led to write in a poetry format, something I never thought I'd ever do. I got some advice from others who wrote and read poetry. I'm thankful for how the Lord helped me through both stories.

It took me about a year to complete all twenty six stories and another six months to get them all formally edited. Now, it's time to find a publisher, and figure out how to copyright my work. Getting twenty six stories copyrighted individually would have cost a small fortune. So I learned about another method that I decided to try. I brought together my stories as a series of chapters within one book, using one title instead of twenty six titles -- resulting in one fee. I needed my writings protected, and this option did what I needed it to do and for a lot less money.

With all the stories now written and edited, it was time to find a publisher or an agent. I started researching the benefits of going either route. I settled on going the route of acquiring a publisher. This was another complete experience within itself which was not all positive. I also was now ready for an illustrator. Her name is Jessica Mulles and she was sixteen years old and in high school when she first agreed to work with me on this lengthy project. Jessica is now in college and is still partnering with me and doing great things. Check out one sample of her work below, expressed in the story “Worrying Winston”.

