

## A 12-step Program for Writers

### **My name is Ane Mulligan, and I'm a writer**

It started off innocently enough. Like most writers, I dabbled with purple poetry in my angst-filled teenage years. I wrote humorous speeches and won high school speech contests. I think that's when the seeds hit the dirt. And their roots sunk deep, wrapping around my soul like an alien octopus.

When I became the creative arts director for my church, the first sprout of my addiction broke through the soil of denial when a deacon's wife asked me to write a short sketch to announce a missions dinner. That script unleashed a rapid-growth kudzu of addiction, when the audience laughed in all the right places.

Full-blown addiction had me when I turned to novels. Now, I hear my characters voices, whispering to me all the time. I can't get away from them. They change their names. They prune my plots and graft them into a different story. Okay, so it's better than the one I planned, but don't I have any control over this?

One day in the mall, I found myself paying for an outfit I'd never wear. It was totally wrong for me but exactly right for my lead character in my latest series. Wild-eyed, I dropped the items on the counter and backed away from the bewildered clerk.

I needed help, but where can a word-addicted writer find it? Shouldn't there be a 12-step program for us? One that binds our wounds when insecurity and rejection take a chain saw to our fragile egos—or maybe a writer's Roundup for weeds like procrastination, mutinous characters, and writer's block.

What would it look like? Pondering this, I realize the proposed program shouldn't remove us from this addiction but rather give us back control. I'm in no way mocking the addiction recovery programs, rather borrowing tried and true principles.

1. Admit we are powerless and unable to stop writing.
2. God could restore us to sanity, but given the fact *He* gave us the gift, that likelihood is nil.
3. Decide to follow the protagonist whenever they hijack our plot.
4. Make a probing and fearless moral inventory of our protagonist.
5. Admit to God, self, and a critique partner the exact nature of our writing weaknesses.
6. Be willing to admit we were wrong and our crit partners were right.
7. Humbly ask God to help us grow rhino skin.
8. Make a list of everyone we've insulted by not speaking to them.
9. Apologize to above list, explaining it wasn't them but an argument with our current protagonist. That should help.
10. Ask God for the power to carry out the task He gave us. Kvetching should be kept to minimum.
11. As a result of these steps, have a spiritual awakening to the call upon us.
12. Admit we are powerless to stop writing, quit whining and get back to work.