

The Nutty Novelist: A 12-Step Program for Writers

By Ane Mulligan

Hello. My name is Ane Mulligan, and I'm a writer

I started off innocently. 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 those roots sunk deep, wrapping around my soul like an alien octopus.

Then I became the creative arts director for my church and 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. When the audience laughed in all the right places, they unleashed a rapid-growth kudzu of addiction.

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That's when I started mainlining novels and, well, now I hear voices whispering all the time. Voices of characters I can never get away from. 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?

Sounds manageable, you say? Not so bad, you opine. But this is where it gets weirder.

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

That's when I knew I needed help. But where can a word-addicted writer find help? I needed a 12-step program! One that binds my wounds when insecurity and rejection take a chain saw to my fragile ego.

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

12 Steps to Regain Control of Your Writing

1. Admit you are powerless and unable to stop writing.
2. God could restore you to sanity, but given the fact *He* gave you the gift, that likelihood is nil.
3. Decide to follow your protagonist whenever he or she hijacks your plot.
4. Make a probing and fearless moral inventory—of your protagonist.
5. Admit to God, self, and a critique partner the exact nature of your writing weaknesses.
6. Be willing to admit you are wrong and your crit partners are right.

7. Humbly ask God to help you grow rhino skin.
8. Make a list of everyone you've insulted by not speaking to them.
9. Apologize to above list. Explain it wasn't them, but an argument with your current protagonist.
10. Ask God for the power to carry out the task He gave you. Kvetching should be kept to minimum.
11. As a result of these steps, experience a spiritual awakening to your calling.
12. Admit you are powerless to stop writing, quit whining, and get back to work.