Writing a Novel

The most important part of writing a novel, to me, is to make it as believable as possible. I also think that good writing should transport the reader as well as the writer into unfamiliar territory, whether it be through a drastically different historical period or a seemingly strange culture, or even a foreign setting. Aside from completing the actual endeavor of writing an entire novel in just a few months, those were my two main goals for this project: making my novel believable and relatable, while drawing from the unknown and foreign at the same time. I believe that I succeeded in completing both these goals as I carefully wrote and meticulously edited my novel, “The Corner Piece”—a passionate, forbidden love story with humorous undertones, set on an Amish farm in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The writer of a novel should learn just as much, if not more, than the reader as she composes and reads her own work. Through my research of the Amish community, I found that I was able to create a culturally and historically accurate work, while at the same time maintaining a captivating story line. However, I chose to make the main character, Felicity, be the product of an American home, so that an aspect of the English world could be thrown into this quaint, Amish community. That way, a slice of familiarity would allow myself as well as the reader to connect with the main character and the plot in a more personal way. The customs of the Amish people seem incredibly strange to Felicity at first because they are drastically different from her life at home, causing the interplay between her world and the Amish world to mesh surprisingly well in both humorous and serious ways. As Felicity learns more and more throughout her experience living in an Amish household, my research opened my eyes and taught me more about the Amish people, as well, squashing my stereotypes and correcting my misconceptions. The more I read about the traditions of the Amish people, the more fascinated I became by their customs. I am infatuated and captivated by the ritual of *rumspringa*, a tradition of rebellion, or "running- around," for every Amish teen before they officially join the Amish church. This fascination with this aspect of Amish life stemmed from the captivating documentary *Devil’s Playground*. Because of this, I decided to make the strange tradition of *rumspringa* an important aspect of my novel's plot.

Before I even decided to write about the Amish, however, I knew that the basic structure of the plot would be that of a forbidden love story. This may seem typical of a novel, and perhaps a little too mainstream, but I chose to do this for a few reasons. First of all, writing a love story is completely out of my comfort zone. I am by no means a romantic, so taking on this type of plot was totally out of my element, immediately requiring me to expand my horizons and mold my style to accommodate this type of story. I tend to write along the lines of disaster or sarcastic, witty dialogue—a novel about love was extremely challenging for me to wrap my head around and begin. I struggled to incorporate the interplay of romantic love with the humorous undertones that I tend to lean towards, but I feel as if I pulled it off seamlessly, although not without bumps in the road. Another reason for going the romantic- route was to re- create and change what a reader may assume about a typical love story. Sure, the skeleton of my finished work was a boy (Ezra)- meets- girl (Felicity) story, but the comic relief I managed to weave into certain passages allowed my style and the essence of my writing to shine through. I used the complexity of Felicity's mind to add another dimension to the story, as her mind jumping from thought to thought is integrated into every scene throughout the novel.

As I brainstormed, I knew I wanted Felicity to be placed out of her element, just as I felt as a writer of an unfamiliar story line, and that's how I came up with the idea of sending her to an Amish farm as a part of an "enriching experience" established by her parents, who we briefly meet in the first and last scenes. In order to correctly portray the farm and her life there, I conducted extensive research on the Amish via books and a documentary (*Devil’s Playground*) about their traditions and values. As Felicity witnesses the family dynamic of her hosts on the farm, the Stoltzfus family, I constantly attempt to show the reader an accurate depiction of what life is like among the Amish, because every good author knows that the setting is every bit as important as the plot. I struggled throughout writing the novel to connect the Amish world with Felicity's, and I did so by describing loving relationships that belong in all societies and by introducing basic human emotion that everyone can relate to, Amish and English alike, from ebullience and tranquility to jealousy and embarrassment in every scene. Throughout the novel, I presented the characters with crises such as untimely death, suicide, unplanned pregnancy, and unrequited love—crises that everybody deals with in their lifetime, in order to make the novel relatable to the readers as well as to further connect the characters with deep grief. As difficult as it was to write about such disturbing events and problematic situations, the way the characters react to such problems is essential to make them believable as well as relatable, whether they be Amish or English. In addition to external issues, Felicity's and Ezra's internal struggles with their identities involve feelings that every person goes through at some point in their lives. Balancing the disaster with humor and passion was a difficult but not insurmountable task, and it was necessary to maintain the integrity of the novel and the characters.

Not only did I want to portray dynamic relationships and complex emotions in my novel, but I also wanted to include some form of symbolism in my final work; this task turned out to be much more difficult than originally expected. First of all, I wanted Ezra, the leading man, to have a signature "look" that changes with his attitudes about ending his *rumspringa* and joining the Amish church. Because the Amish are a community- centered rather than an individualistic society like most of America, it wasn't easy providing Ezra with a "look" that didn't go against the rules of the Amish church. However, I used the rebellious days of *rumspringa* as a loophole to give Ezra his own style. I wanted the symbol of his rebellion to be decidedly "American" themed, so I went with a baseball cap, not only because baseball is "America's pastime," but also because a hat can be easily taken on and off to match Ezra's dynamically changing view on his direction in life. Another symbol I included represented Ezra and Felicity's less- than- traditional relationship—a puzzle. In fact, the title of my novel, "The Corner Piece," reflects the reoccurring puzzle theme.

"The Corner Piece" is a title that just clicked for me when I first typed the words into a passage. The titles of the chapters, on the other hand, took some time to come up with. I could have omitted chapter titles entirely, but I felt that they were necessary—without them, the novel seemed unfinished. I ended up using the lines from Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". I knew I had to pay homage to the great Shakespeare in some way, considering that the whole idea of forbidden love conjures up scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* in my mind. Not only that, but Felicity, the main character, is obsessed with Shakespeare's sonnets and the way he depicts the nature and all- consuming power of love. This particular sonnet worked amazingly well, because the story line is set in the summertime and also because each line miraculously fits the chapter it is paired with in a flawless way. Once I had the researched facts, the story line, the symbols, and the title of the novel all wrapped up and in place, I followed a route I had not expected to tread upon when I initially started this project—I submitted my work to various agents using an agent query website online (http://www.agentquery.com/default.aspx), hoping that one of them will represent me so that I can someday find a publisher.

While submitting queries about my novels to agents was not an expected part of my project, it was a very fulfilling aspect. I got a taste of how the publishing industry works, and since I have always wanted to publish my own book, I figured this project was a great way to take the first step. Ultimately, I am happy with my finished work and will continue to pursue my goal of finding a publisher.