

Under the Apple Tree

The When, the What and the Why.

2.55 a.m. and I'm wide awake. (Insomnia? I invented the concept.)

I lie still for a while, hoping I'll drift off, thinking through the outline for the next chapter in Book 2 of the Peace Weaver trilogy. At least, I hope it's going to be a trilogy. I'm almost at the end of the first draft for Book 2, and this is a crucial chapter. I step inside it, walk it through as if I'm there in the scene. How is each character feeling? What are they trying to hide? What are they trying to get from this moment? The characters are talking, dialogue runs through my mind.

A furtive glance at the clock. Oh no. I've been awake for ages. Sarah, get a grip. Go to sleep!

I trying counting backwards... slow breathing...

Enough! I can lie no longer on the wrinkled sheets. I sit up and scribble some notes in the old diary I keep by the bed before I forget my thoughts on that chapter, the dialogue, that phrase that I liked. Middle of the night plotting is a bit like dreams, apt to become elusive by the morning, so I need to get it down on paper. (I always start a diary each year with true enthusiasm, but by January 4th I've stopped, so it converts to a scribble notebook.)

Okay, can sleep now.

4.55 Awake after a brief sleep. Try again to hold on to it, but half an hour later, I give up. I get out the computer. Yes, yes, no screens in the bedroom. Entirely good advice which I normally keep to but this is a bad patch, and besides it's getting light outside. It's nearly morning, right?

Yesterday, I did some sketches for the Dog Mad Artist, a book I'm putting together with Roj Haines about drawing and painting dogs. Companion piece to the Horse Mad Artist. (Do check them out on the website or Amazon, you'll love them.) I photographed the sketches ready to insert in the book. This is a section on how to draw dog noses which is more difficult than you might think! Did you know that dogs can scent human pheromones so they can sense our emotions?

So I sit up in bed, load the images, crop and size them, add captions. Four pages done. Enough!

Okay, can sleep now, and I do.

6.30 Yay! I've made it through the night. Actually only two middle-of-the-night stops and that's pretty good for me. I rest for half an hour, but by seven I'm raring to go. Reach for the scribble diary and make a To Do list for the day. Don't you just love lists? They contain things and give you a sense of achievement when you've done something.

Today's list looks like this:

Think through the next chapter.

Write the notes.

Draft the pages on dog noses.

(I proudly give these a modest tick.)

The list goes on:

Take dog to the vet for his jab

Do the food shopping

Ditto ironing

Ring X company about the item I bought which has not arrived.

Book the opticians.

Sort out the lunch

Get birthday present for Child Number 3...would a silver locket be a good idea?

School run.

Take Child Number 2 to rugby practice.

Enough! You get the drift! I absolutely do NOT recommend shredding sleep to find the time to write/paint/do crochet, but I do think you should carve some time for yourself in your overcrowded day. It is too easy to develop a mindset where we feel guilty about doing something for ourselves. We become our lowest priority.

But you're the engine that runs a job or holds a family together, probably both. Engines need fuel, and batteries run out if they are not recharged. So refresh your own batteries. You're needed.

PS Get some sleep. Lots of it!

