



Writing Stories for General Audiences

by Carol Harrison

an isolated Northern community where the store had almost no supplies for months seemed like fiction even though I had lived it. For this publication, the stories must not only be true but recognized as truth. Other publications might want the Northern stories.

When I write stories which preserve family history, my audience is known. We share common ancestors and often memories. But I also write stories that can entertain, educate, and encourage an audience beyond family members. Anthologies and periodicals provide a means to have these stories reach much further than relatives and friends.

Knowing your audience, whether in writing stories or speaking, is sage advice. The question becomes tougher to answer when the target audience is not a specific age group or when they come from various backgrounds, cultures, and faiths. The writer faces challenges in order to reach a broad group of people with their story, essay, or article.

The majority of my published, short, nonfiction stories have appeared in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books which reach a varied audience in about one hundred countries and have been translated into over forty languages. These iconic books of short stories, according to their website, are meant to share happiness, inspiration, and hope.

Here are a few tips to consider if you write for a general audience:

1. Read the guidelines for the specific publication to which you plan to submit your story in order to learn what the editors are looking for.
2. Read some stories they have published previously to give you a better idea of the style of writing the publication prints. You can subscribe to an online newsletter from *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Every day one of their published stories from random books will be sent to your email. You can read stories based on many of their topics without buying multiple books.
3. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* wants true stories. I have realized these stories must also be believable to people in many other parts of the world. My stories of life in

4. Each story also needs to be relatable to multiple cultures, countries, and backgrounds. I received an email from a gentleman in the Middle East about one of my stories, "The Wedding Dress," published in the *Mothers and Daughters* book. He told me he translated it into Arabic for his wife to read because he wanted her to be encouraged as she provided things for their daughter. The message of the story could translate into another culture and language.

5. The language needs to be free of idioms, unless the meaning becomes clear within the story. Also, technical jargon or acronyms will detract and limit audience understanding and appeal. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* does not discourage writing from a faith perspective and have occasionally published a book of devotions. However, the story must not be preachy. I wrote a story, "The Nativity Set," which talked about the real meaning of Christmas through a personal story about the importance, to my young daughter, of the birth of Jesus.

My faith is an integral part of who I am. The stories of my life reflect my views and my interactions with others. Faith impacts how I choose to tell the story even without mentioning specific Bible passages. My published stories have opened dialogue with people I would never have had an opportunity to interact with. I have received emails and have been able to share encouragement with others. My stories, which go to varied audiences, still present the truth, although in a different manner than a sermon or a devotional, for the truth of my faith is part of what I believe and who I am. I pray that it will shine through the story and encourage the reader to think, to ask questions, and to enjoy.

Carol Harrison, B.Ed., from Saskatoon, has published one book, *Amee's Story*, and has short stories in eleven anthologies including eight *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. She is an active Toastmaster, speaks to a variety of audiences, and teaches communication workshops.

