

As the Writers Juggle...Episode #9 - Karen M. Rider



Hi, welcome to another episode of "As the Writers Juggle," in which we ask writers to share their tips on keeping balance in their writing lives. Our guest today is Karen M. Rider, a freelance writer of both nonfiction and fiction. In addition to contract and promotional writing, she's a columnist for [Inner Tapestry Holistic Journal](#), [Natural Nutmeg](#), and [The Door Opener](#). She tells us, "... my dream is still in the launch phase—off the ground with all engines working at maximum thrust.... What I am experiencing might

be inspiration for others who are uncertain how to begin living their writing dream."

Q: Welcome, Karen! Tell us about the other responsibilities that you juggle along with your writing.

Karen: *I have two daughters; the eldest is almost three, and the youngest is six months. My children are the reason I write. Writing was a dream trapped by fears for a long time. When I became a mother, I realized the only way I could truly encourage my daughter to follow HER dreams was if I let her see how I was living my dream. So, in the Fall of 2006 I began to do just that. However, my husband and I felt it best to have a stay-at-home parent, so family life is my full-time work. Since I don't have family that lives in-state, I don't have the benefit of easy access to a babysitting grandparent—my girls go with me just about everywhere, weather permitting.*

My schedule shifts as their activities and developmental needs shift. I also write in balance with what they need from the family, but I try to structure blocks of time based on freelance assignments and fiction writing goals that I have for myself. I am a contract writer for an educational association and a write promotional copy for an event management company and small businesses. I also write a column six times a year for a regional holistic health magazine (that does not pay, but great experience) and I landed a four-issue column with a wellness magazine that currently publishes in three states. This, I hope will grow into something more. I've written profiles, features, essays, and interviews and promotional copy of all kinds. Income is not always consistent; over time it adds to the piggy bank and keeps my clips file fresh.

As far as fiction writing- I also write short stories and have a novel under construction. Last summer, I launched and facilitate a writing group that has spawned a spin-off group a few towns over. THE WRITER'S CIRCLE is innovative in its group structure, intention and offerings. Non-dues paying membership is capped at 12, groups decide to cater to men or women or both sexes. Each monthly meeting focuses on an activity: writing practice, guest writer/speaker leading a mini-workshop, Critique JAM Sessions, Writer's Grand Rounds, resource sharing, a holiday gathering and a mid-year retreat in July. I will be marketing the Circle format so that others in need of a true writing group don't have to reinvent the wheel. I'm active in the CT Authors and Publishers Association, too.

Did I mention, I have husband, too. And, a big Siberian Husky.

*If I had to calculate time – then **there is not enough time in the day** for all that I hope to do with my writing,*



my family, and my recreational time.

My husband's support of my writing has waxed and waned, especially in the beginning. As he witnessed my commitment to my passion, he realized this was something to be taken seriously. He also likes the months when extra money comes in!

Q: That's great that you're providing support to other writers. It's so important to have colleagues to share your journey with.

When you're done chasing down the kids, about how many hours a day does that leave you for writing?

Karen: *I almost always get two hours a day, four days a week—that's nap time for the kiddies. Two days a week, my older child goes to a preschool program, so I can usually get four hours on those days. The more energy I have, the more I am actually sitting down to write. Don't misunderstand... my mind is always working on something. As I drift off to sleep I am asking questions about my fiction project and usually waking up with notes to make.*

And when a child is ill or not cooperating on my terms, I have to reschedule my time. That might entail a 4 a.m. wake-up call. Depends on how much energy I need for the day that looms ahead.

Q: Yeah, keeping up with two little kids can take a ton of energy. If only they'd give us some of theirs! How do you organize it all?

Karen: *I try to plan a day or two out—beyond that, with kids, is a waste of energy.*

I'm trying to get up earlier, but I hate winter and that makes it tough for me. Not to mention "earlier" in this household means 3:30 or 4:30 a.m., as my daughters are up and ready to take on the world by 6:00. If something is really driving me, then I do get up extra early, for one hour and go back to sleep so I'm not totally shot for a day with toddlers and crawlers.

So, I structure my morning based on my kids' activities, the weather, household chores (which I will slack on until I can't take the sight of things!), and if I want to exercise that day (usually a requirement for sustaining my sanity).

Q: You might be pleased to know that most of our previous interviewees highly recommend slacking off when it comes to housekeeping. So you're in good company!

You mentioned that when the toddlers and crawlers rest, that's when you get busy.

Karen: *Nap time comes and I am working on something. If naptime doesn't come when I expect it (or at all) then I have a mandatory quiet play time in which I take care of the most important work item, then return to caring for my kids. Now, I know I have to write that night, no matter what.*

Every day is different—if I had to get up with one of the girls overnight, and I'm mentally or physically tired—I've learned to let go and take the path of least resistance that day. (as long as a client isn't waiting on me, which is rare, because I excel at planning for deadlines)

When all else fails—and there is extra money--I call a babysitter.

Q: Do you have a favorite writing place?

Karen: *My sunroom.*

Q: Oh, gee, I'd lo-o-o-ve a sunroom!!

How do you keep from losing your momentum?

Karen: *I never lose sight of WHY I'm doing this: to inspire my daughters to live true to their passion and follow their dreams.*

Q: What a lovely source of inspiration!

What do you do when you get blocked?

Karen: *Play with my kids; do yoga; go for a walk; window shop; read; email mentor; email members of The Writer's Circle; cry J*

Q: Oh, yeah, I can definitely relate to the crying part.

Do you find it difficult to make the transition between your family responsibilities and writing? How do you handle it?

Karen: *My family and writing responsibilities are seamless....but when I sit to write, especially fiction, I am in the zone, as they say.*

Q: What helps motivate you and keep you on track? Are you self-motivated or do you need outside naggers to help?

Karen: *Combination. My children, my writing group, my inner drive.*

Q: How do you deal with distractions—either outside or inner procrastinatorial/avoidance issues?

Karen: *Usually, if a distraction is in the form of my three-year-old saying "you did enough working today, mommy." Or her behavior is getting out of hand, then I know it is time for ME to stop what I'm doing and focus on her. I ignore the phone and sometimes forget that I put clothes in the washer.... I give my inner critic space to vent and counter everything it has to say to keep it from stopping me from writing (took me a year to master that!)*

Q: Do you feel you have enough time for fun/relaxation/non-writing hobbies or activities you'd like to pursue?

Karen: *I used to do two-a-day workouts—one with the dog, and one at the fitness center. Bad weather, nap schedules, sick kids (or parent), kids classes... all this has to be balanced. I do less volunteer work unless it involves giving back through writing, like with The Writer's Circle, or the Mom's Network.*

Q: What advice would you give to others struggling with writing/job/time management issues?

Karen: **MY 4-Ps:** *Know your Priorities and Focal Areas. Keep an honest Perspective. Develop a Process that works for you. Stay grounded in the Present-moment. And always, allow your Passion to be your guide.*

Get a personal coach if you're really struggling. By the way... an article on this very topic will be published in the next few months.

Q: Are there any other issues/ideas you'd like to mention?

Karen: *Get your spouse on board.. it may not happen overnight, but that support is critical. Well, for me it is. It tickles my writer's funny bone when my spouse is as interested in my professional pursuits as I am in his. A simple "how's the novel going?" or "Do you need some time this afternoon for that project you mentioned?"-- that's all it takes.*

I'm starting to realize that there are more ideas in my head than the time in the day to flesh everything out on paper. Until my kids are school-age, I have to choose more carefully what kinds of paid work I look for and accept—especially if I want to get my novel out from under construction and standing in its own binding in a Barnes & Noble!

OH... create a professional image. Before I started querying local and national magazines, I designed a logo... came up with a tag line that reflects my core values... which are also symbolized in the logo along with my "writer's mission"...

Karen's nifty logo is at the top of the page. For the story behind the logo, go to:

<http://www.abacabdesigns.com/karenmrider.html>

Thanks, Karen! Hope to see you in Barnes & Noble soon!