

A Season of Thankfulness



The patio furniture is covered and tucked away. Bare tree branches stab into the sky, and the breeze blows with the distinct edge of winter. With Thanksgiving only days away, many of us take time to count the things for which we are thankful. Most people's lists, including mine, rank family, friends, and good health at the top.

I like to put a spin on the traditional list and remember that there are many things to be thankful for, like garage door openers and self-cleaning ovens. When temperatures are in the teens, I am grateful I can sit in my warm car, press a button and have my garage door open. Being thankful for seemingly everyday items also helps me smile about some of my lesser appreciated skills.

One of these skills, or let's call this a knack, became apparent as soon as I moved into my first apartment. I have a knack for setting off the smoke alarm. As a young adult, it was easy to blame the tight quarters of apartment living for the recurring drill of waving a towel under the smoke alarm. Often the culprit was a blob of oozing mozzarella that slid off the frozen pizza onto the heating element of an electric stove.

When we moved into a house, I was excited that the smoke alarm was further away from the oven. This, however, did not end the towel-waving under the smoke alarm. My cooking repertoire was expanding, thus increasing the number of dishes that could ooze over the edges of their pans onto the oven floor filling the house with smoke. Over time, I learned to put a cookie sheet under the item I was cooking. The cookie sheet caught those drips preventing spills onto the oven floor.

Once in a while, something still oozes over the pan. There's a resulting blanket of smoke hanging near the ceiling, the tinge of burnt in the air, and the baked-on mess on the oven floor. This happened recently – another cheese-oozing-off-pizza event. It reminded me that I am thankful for self-cleaning ovens.

After wiping the loose crumbs from the cooled oven, I removed the shelves and pressed the "Self-Clean" option. Hours later the oven was ready to wipe down. (You can see it in the picture.) Instead of chastising myself for not paying enough attention when I was cooking or beating myself up for having this extra chore, I looked in the oven and thought--It'll be clean and ready for holiday baking.



As you gather with friends and family during this season, find thankfulness and joy in all those moments you share—even the ones that don't go as perfectly as planned. And appreciate all your special skills—like my knack for setting off the smoke alarm.

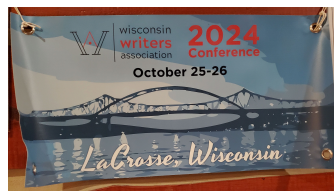
A special thank you to all of you for joining me so early in my writing journey!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Making Connections

In late October, I attended the Wisconsin Writer's Association Conference held in beautiful La Crosse, Wisconsin. While my cozy mystery story takes place in the fictional town of Fox Springs in southeastern Wisconsin, La Crosse is in the driftless area on the western side of the state nestled against the Mississippi River. Perhaps my sleuth, Jaine Spencer, will take a visit there one day, but right now, she's got a lot on her hands in Fox Springs.

In any career, it's important to make connections. I am not talking about taking false interest in another person for the sake of promoting yourself, but to make real connections. Making connections is difficult, even more so when you are new in a field and feeling a bit like an imposter. Sitting next to people who were already published, who already know other people at the conference, who sound like they knew what they were doing, I asked myself, why am I here? What do I have to add? And then I listened.



What I heard was inspiration, advice, and encouragement. From the two keynote speakers, Ann Garvin and Lan Samantha Chang, who shared their writing journeys, to the individual sessions about writing and the business of writing, the speakers and the attendees were open and willing to share. Every room buzzed with energy. During meals, the ballroom overflowed with the uplifting chatter of writers connecting with one another. I was buoyed with the confidence that there was a world of support I could reach out to. A world that wanted me to find success in the way that I defined it.

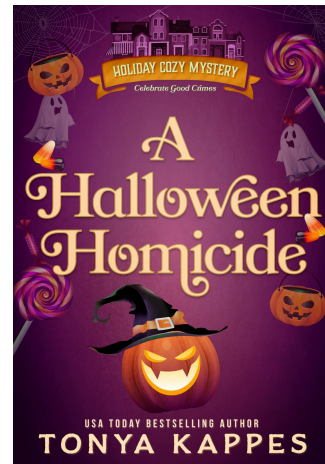
In two short days, I learned new tips and skills that I could use right away, and I was energized to continue this path, though it may be rough and rocky. And I made connections with people. People who helped me realize that I am not an imposter.

Book Review

A Halloween Homicide by [Tonya Kappes](#)

Who wouldn't love a town that goes all out to celebrate every holiday? Holiday Junction is getting ready for Halloweenie, the town's Halloween festival, but Violet Rhinehammer, local journalist and the town's Merry Maker, doesn't like Halloween. When Peter Hill, president of the Holiday Junction Planning Committee, pops up dead during the dry run of the ghost walk, Violet has to sort through the turmoil boiling under the surface of the planning committee to find the murderer in time for the festival to begin.

This is an easy, fun read that will have you turning the pages to follow Violet through the adventure.



Something special is coming your way in December: a minute mystery for you to solve. Encourage your family and friends to sign up for the newsletter, so they can solve the mystery too.

Thanks for reading!



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