

All Aboard!

If you follow me on Facebook, you may know that I recently took an awesome trip out West, starting with the Rockies to the Red Rocks sight-seeing train on the Rocky Mountaineer followed by several stops while driving from Moab, Utah to Phoenix, Arizona. Throughout the trip, I was struck with the parallels between taking a vacation and writing a novel. The one consistent theme was how a successful trip requires planning, adjusting, and discovering—just like writing.



The Rocky Mountaineer: Rockies to the Red Rocks.

Plotting or Pantsing

In the writing community, writers often categorize themselves as either a plotter or a pantsier. A plotter meticulously creates an outline with layers of detail, identifying each scene and laying out the action of the story. While pantsiers write whatever thought happens to come to them next. In reality, all writers do a bit both, even if they don't want to admit it. At some level, all writers are thinking about or planning what comes next, even if only subconsciously, and well-architected stories detour from the plan when creative inspiration strikes. Much like some of



The red color is the iron in the rock

the great movie lines and movie scenes are created in the moment.

For example, the Cairo market scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was supposed to feature a sword versus whip fight, but due to Harrison Ford's illness, the scene was cut short with the Indiana Jones character shooting the swordsmen. That change created one of the most iconic movie fight scenes of all time.

While no illnesses impacted this trip, there was definitely a combination of planning and pantsing.

Planning with Some Pantsing

This trip required an additional level of planning because my husband and I were accompanied by another couple. The four of us needed to agree, not just on dates, but on what we wanted to see and do after the train trip ended in Moab, Utah.

Since Arches National Park is located just outside Moab, that made a logical first stop. When researching Arches, I discovered that popular national parks require visitors to reserve an entry time. ([Research your visit to a national park.](#)) Since we were going to arrive in Moab in the late afternoon, our plan was to visit the park the first thing the next morning. So, I reserved our entry time for that morning.

leeching out in the rain.



The train follows the Colorado river.



On the train, we learned that there was a group going to Arches the afternoon we arrived in Moab. If they thought they were going to have enough time to tour the park, we decided we would too. I jumped on my cell phone, grateful we were back in a coverage area, and was able to reserve an entry time for that afternoon.

By adding a dash of pantsing to our plan, we were able to visit Arches when the crowd was lighter and get a head start on our post-train itinerary.

All Planning

One item on our itinerary was to visit Meteor Crater. Meteor Crater was created when a meteor crashed into the Earth about 50,000 years ago. The crater is about 550 feet deep and over 4,000 feet wide. It's simply stunning to see.



After looking at driving directions and map locations, we learned that the crater was just outside Winslow, Arizona. Eagles fans familiar with the song "Take it Easy" know the line about standing on a corner in Winslow, Arizona. I didn't realize that a real event inspired the line.



Research on the area revealed that Winslow has a pocket park on the corner that inspired that line. The park has a statue of Glen Frey and a flat bed Ford. We all knew we had to stop there, especially since one person in our group is a musician. All of us had fun posing at different points in the park.

We wouldn't have known about this fun stop if we hadn't done some planning.

Pantsing the Details

A couple of times during the trip we had an idea of what we were going to do, but not any specific plan. One of those times was the day we spent in Prescott, Arizona. We knew we were going to visit the town and that they had a few antique stores, but we had no specific plans.

We had a great time exploring the town, visiting the antique stores, walking through



the historic Hassayampa Inn hotel lobby, and, my favorite, visiting [Peregrine Book Company](#).

The store had an awesome selection of books in every genre, along with book-related gift items. And the staff was so friendly. You should really visit if you're in the area.

Back Home

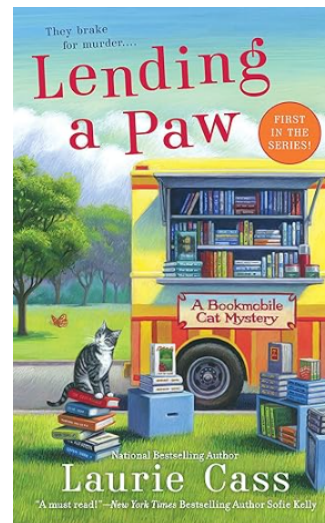
Grateful to be back home and working at my computer, I am still planning and pantsing. The entire story is written. I already know who did it (but I won't tell you). At this point, I am tightening up the details, weaving through the subplots, and making sure there aren't any holes in the story. I know what I need to do the story, but I still get those pantsing aha moments that polish a point, ensuring that you, my reader, will enjoy the story.

Book Review

Lending a Paw by Laurie Cass

I enjoyed the previous bookmobile cat mystery by Laurie Cass so much, I needed to go back to the beginning. In this installment, the first of the series, we are introduced to Minnie Hamilton, her friends, the small town of Chilson, and how her cat Eddie adopted her.

Without any previous skill or history of solving a murder, Minnie feels compelled to solve the murder of the benefactor of the bookmobile, the person without whom she wouldn't be able to bring the library to the outreaches of the Chilson library district. She feeds any tips or pieces of information that she gathers to the detectives working on the case. Unfortunately, they seem to ignore



every piece of information she provides them. What else is she supposed to do but continue to follow any leads she uncovers?



It's almost publication day! My article, titled "Serenity in the Risk," is scheduled for publication in the June edition of *Creative Wisconsin*, a [publication](#) of the Wisconsin Writer's Association.

I'll post on Facebook when it is available.



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