

Going Dark

Growing up, I always wanted to be a writer.

Not a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher or – like my husband – a spy or an astronaut.

So imagine my surprise when I realized that being a writer is, at times, similar to being an astronaut.

A writer is like an astronaut because they:

- spend years training before the launch. (Edie Melson, Co-director of the Blue Ridge Mountain Christian Writers Conference)
- are going into the unknown. (Rachel Hauck, award-winning author)
- are not bound by the gravitational pull of normal. (Reba J. Hoffman, My Book Therapy Member Care Coach)

Remember the infamous “Houston, we’ve had a problem here” pronouncement by Astronaut Jack Swigert, one of the Apollo 13 crewmembers? (Yes, in the movie Tom Hanks said “Houston, we have a problem” – but the screenwriters mangled Swigert’s words.)

At times, writers realize: *I’ve got a problem here – with my plot, with my character arc.*

With my ending. I rewrote the ending of my novel, *Catch a Falling Star* four times. *Four times.*

While on deadline, I discovered another way writers are like astronauts: In 1968, Apollo 8 astronauts orbited the moon for the first time. They experienced 45 minutes of “going dark” – losing contact with mission control while they traveled around the far side of the moon.

In the midst of a book deadline, I forced myself to think like an astronaut and “go dark.”

I lost contact. How?

- I told friends and family, “I’m living on deadline” so they weren’t surprised by my disappearance from regular life.

- I limited non-writing activities such as lunch with friends and other fun stuff (think: movies, TV shows, even my participation in my family's spring break activities).
- I posted on Facebook: *I'm on deadline & I'm Going Dark!* Other writers are great at hounding you off social media when you should be writing.
- I upped my writing schedule. I got up earlier (4 AM), which meant I had to get to bed earlier. A non-rested writer means a non-productive writer.
- I ignored non-essential stuff: laundry, housework, cooking. Yes, I'm good at ignoring that anyway – but when I'm "Dark" all of that is *invisible* to me. I apologized to my family for the neglect—and then kept writing.
- I didn't answer my phone when I was writing. Remember: Going Dark = No communication. Exceptions? In no particular order: My agent. My husband. My daughter's school. A friend in crisis.

Is Going Dark easy? No – it isn't for real astronauts and it isn't for writers. But sometimes it's necessary to accomplish the mission. To meet a deadline.

Have you ever Gone Dark? Any tips for other writers contemplating a trip to the far siding of the writing world?