

## The Power of Story Question

I've only run out of gas once – but I was about seven months pregnant and driving alone. Having no idea that a gallon of gas weighs about six pounds, I filled the emergency gas can with five gallons of gas. And yes, I lugged it back to my stranded car – uphill all the way.

Has your work-in-progress (WIP) ever run out gas? You're motoring along, past Act 1 and the Inciting Incident that started your main characters' journey. A quick glance at your notes indicates you're somewhere in Act 2. But the story you were so excited about a few weeks ago is sputtering – and then it grinds to a halt and you're stranded on the side of the writing road.

How did this happen?

Did you remember to tank up before you started writing? Maybe you put the wrong type of gas in your car. Did you even think to fuel up with a Story Question?

Every story has a theme – an overall idea that can usually be summarized by a single word. *Wish You Were Here*, my debut novel, focused on the theme of forgiveness.

Best-selling author Susan May Warren, founder of the My Book Therapy writing community, first taught me how a Story Question asks a deeper question of the heart and mind. The Story Question asks the great “what if?” If you lose sight of your novel's Story Question, your novel loses focus.

Ask these four questions to help develop your Story Question:

1. Why does your story matter to you?
2. What is your story's theme?
3. What is your hero/heroine learning about the theme?
4. What do you want to say about the theme through your characters?

Here's how I answered these questions for my latest release, *Catch a Falling Star*:

1. *Catch a Falling Star (CAFS)* matters to me because it's based on a conversation I had with a friend who has wrestled with life not going

- according to all her plans. Reality is, everyone deals with life not going according to plan.
2. *CAFS*'s theme is contentment.
  3. My hero and heroine learn that life can be satisfying and joy-filled even when it doesn't look anything like they had planned.
  4. I want to say that God is in the plans that work out – and he's in the plans that don't work out too.

After working through these questions and brainstorming with some writing comrades, I settled on this Story Question for *Catch a Falling Star*: *What do you do if life doesn't go according to plan?*

Once you've developed your Story Question, write it down and then post it over your computer so that you don't lose sight of it. Every chapter, every scene of your novel is fueled by your Story Question. Your main characters are answering that great "what if?" as they move from the first page all the way to "The End."