

## Nancy Cavanaugh

BY SIMON SANDALL · FEBRUARY 1, 2013 ·

READERSVOICE.COM aims to collect a few interesting reading tips. An author once said that the difference between a poem and a short story was that a poem tries to say too much in too short a space, and a short story says too little. Perhaps this has been remedied by micro fiction (100-250 words), twitterfic (140 characters) and flash fiction (200-1000 words). Author Nancy Cavanaugh has applied a variety of short story styles to these mediums. Her fiction can be found at My Flashy Words. See her website [nancyacavanaugh.com](http://nancyacavanaugh.com).

**READERSVOICE.COM:** What are some of your favorite books of all time?

**NANCY CAVANAUGH:** I tend not to have favorite books as much as I do favorite authors, but I do have a few favorites. Anything Nancy Drew, *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, and, of course, *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne. For authors, I love Judy Blume, John Jakes, Nelson DeMille, and Judith Krantz.

**RV:** What's the difference between what makes a good story in newspaper journalism and a good story in fiction, in your experience?

**NC:** In journalism, there is a formula that starts with packing most of the important parts of the story in the first few paragraphs then filling in the details afterwards and brevity is preferred for most stories. I have always loved the constraints of newspaper writing, especially hard news. Typically a good story in fiction, while still following a formula, is the exact opposite. In the beginning you start with a hint of what the story is about then you build on that until the end when all is revealed. It is much more free and there are far fewer constraints.

**RV:** Do you still live in Keene, New Hampshire, and what do you like about the area?

**NC:** Yes, I still live in Keene. We, my daughter and I, moved here from northern New Jersey in 2005. I bought a deluxe double wide and we settled in. There are several things I like about Keene — there's so much nature around with mountains, lakes, rivers and parks; it is a cultural center for the area with a lot of theater, music, comedy and art; almost all your shopping needs can be met in town; the downtown area is quaint and has been named one of the top ten downtowns in the country; there are a ton of social services and a hospital in town; and the people are super friendly.

**RV:** How did you come across flash fiction and micro fiction in 2006-7?

**NC:** I belonged to the MuseltUp Club, a place for writers to get together and chat on Yahoo Groups. They also offered critique groups. It was there I met and started reading the works of Michael Kechula, who specialized in micro and flash fiction. I joined his group of merry writers who were focused on learning more about writing these types of stories and quickly discovered that I had a knack for it. Suddenly I had a place where I could apply many rules of journalism to fictional writing. It gave my imagination a new way to soar. This is also when I started writing speculative fiction — ghosts, aliens, vampires, zombies, cannibals, etc. I started submitting to online publications and finding homes for many of my stories.

## Nancy Cavanaugh p2

BY SIMON SANDALL · FEBRUARY 1, 2013 ·

**Author Nancy Cavanaugh talks about getting an inspiration and winging it when writing stories, and humor as a twist.**

**READERSVOICE.COM:** Your stories on *My Flashy Words* have a lot of different styles of story structure. Revenge plots like in *Telling Revenge* and *No Regrets*, problem and solution with a set-up of the solution earlier in the story eg. *Mistakes in Cloning*, puns in the punchline like in *Heavenly Entrails*. Can you give some pointers on plotting stories?

**NANCY CAVANAUGH:** I could give pointers on story plotting but I'm not a plotter. I am a 'by the seat of my pants' type writer, or pantsier. When I get an idea for a story or am using story prompts, I tend to get a flash of inspiration that provides me with the basics of the story from start to finish. Sometimes I will start with a focus like the genre, but I have no idea where the story is going to go until I get there. Often times I'm as surprised by where the story goes as the reader is. You have to be willing to follow the flow and listen to your muse.

A good example of this is a story that I started writing for NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) a few years ago. I decided to do the whole plotting out of the story, character development, etc. as I was participating in a workshop specifically for NaNoWriMo and this is how they were presenting novel writing. I tried to follow the story, and I did for the first few thousand words. Then I discovered the story was not going to be how I plotted it, which called for the main character finding an elephant bird egg and map in grandma's attic and the exciting adventure of following the map in Madagascar to discover a hidden land filled with elephant birds. Instead, it was about how a 17 year old boy dealt with the loss of his grandmother. I ended up not finishing the story because two weeks into the writing my teenage daughter's grandmother died suddenly and I was dealing with the story matter in real life.

**RV:** Your stories include elements of humor, especially dark humor, in even the most dramatic situations. I was wondering what was your attitude to humor and its importance in your fiction.

**NC:** Humor is life's way of providing relief and breaking the tension or making you not feel so badly about what has just happened. I really enjoy the comedic style of Anthony Jeselnik. He tells a really dark story then finishes it with a punch line that goes in a direction you're not expecting. I like the twists that humor can provide in a story, especially at the end. I like my stories to be unexpected to keep people guessing and off balance, humor makes that easier. I especially like when I can end a story with a pun, the bigger the groaner the better. I actually spent an hour Googling for the perfect pun to end *Heavenly Entrails*. The time was well spent as it was the groaner ending that 'sold' the story to Flashshot.

A good example of this was a story I wrote a few days ago for my co-worker titled *Distractions*. He had given me a three word writing prompt — clumsy, mountain lion, windsurfing. In the story, the main character is distracted and ends up dying. The story ends with the rangers telling the character's parents how he died, which included possibly being eaten by a hungry wolf, and the father saying the son always did like Duran Duran. My co-worker commented, "I felt bad about the guy dying then I read the Duran Duran part and didn't feel so bad."

**Nancy Cavanaugh p3**

BY SIMON SANDALL · FEBRUARY 1, 2013 ·

**Author Nancy Cavanaugh talks flash- and micro-fiction and cites a favorite micro fiction author and his website.**

**READERSVOICE.COM:** You've been published on flash fiction websites like Flashshot, Postcard Shorts and Fiction Flyer. What are some other favorite sites or hardcopy magazines you like for Flash and Micro fiction?

**NANCY CAVANAUGH:** I don't often have time to read fiction so I really don't have a favorite site or magazine for this type of writing. One of my favorite writers and publisher of micro fiction stories is 50-Word Stories by Tim Sevenhuysen (<http://fiftywordstories.com>). The stories are fascinating to write and read because they have to be exactly fifty words. I've been published on the site a few times, though not recently.

**RV:** Do you think flash fiction has had an influence on traditional longer short story writing?

**NC:** I don't think it has. They're such completely different beasts. Good flash fiction is devoid of details or information that isn't constantly moving the story forward. You can toss in a few descriptive words here and there but when it comes time to get the word count, they are the first ones to be eliminated. With traditional short story writing, they're still looking for deeper, richly detailed stories and pushing the limits on word counts.

**RV:** Will you be releasing any more books like My Flashy Words in the near future, and do you have other plans?

**NC:** I had taken a bit of an unplanned hiatus from writing micro and flash fiction. Between work, college and taking care of my daughter, much of my time is accounted for and I wasn't having much inspiration for writing like that. The last few weeks, however, I've become inspired once again and the stories are flowing. I've been asking for writing prompts and am participating in a Flash Fiction Project that lasts a week, with photo prompts, which has helped. You can read two of the stories I wrote for the project on my web site — The Trouble with Birds and Know Thyself. If I'm able to come up with 50 or so new stories to put into a collection, I'll probably release a new eBook but there isn't a set plan to do that. At the moment, I'm more focused on finishing some of my longer pieces that I hope will be novella or novel length and editing. I have several projects that I'm working including some picture book stories for children, a potentially controversial story for young adults and a few mysteries that are graphic with grisly murders, rapes, and cannibalism.

-See [nancyacavanaugh.com](http://nancyacavanaugh.com).

-copyright Simon Sandall.