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HOW TO STAY AWAKE AND SANE DURING A WRITER'S CONFERENCE

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How many conferences have you attended where all you wanted to do was sleep? By day two you dragged yourself out of bed after a late night session wondering how you'd manage to put two words together for that all-important meeting with that big-time publisher.

When the conference ended all you wanted to do was go home and cry. This let down is not unusual. For days, you delight in a mountaintop experience, then it ends—just like that--and reality sets in. You begin to question what you said and did, what other writers, editors, workshop leaders and others said to you. What did it all mean? You end up confused, upset, run-down and depressed wondering if you'll EVER be able to write like so and so.

Your conference experience doesn't need to end with depression. There are some simple things you can do to enhance your enjoyment of the conference as well as to leave you feeling up instead of down.

How a conference goes for you both during and afterwards depends on preparation and planning before the conference ever starts.

Every conference is different and appeals to different individuals. Check out the conference you are considering as much as possible to see if they offer the workshops, publishers, editors, etc. that best reflects where you're headed as a writer.

Register as early as possible so you don't get stressed worrying about deadlines. This also goes for critiques you need to send in. The less stressed out you are just before the conference, the better. Trust me, if God wants you at this conference Satan will throw enough roadblocks in your way without your assistance.

As soon as you know you plan to attend a conference, start praying. Pray for yourself and what God wants to accomplish through you during the conference. It may not be what you think. Sometimes, God may want you there not to get your big break, but to minister to someone else. Pray for the other attendees, the organizing committee, the keynote

speaker, workshop leaders, volunteers, and the staff of the place that holds the conference. Pray for safety and health and the right spirit for all who are part of the conference.

Go with the right attitude. Whether you're a novice or an experienced writer, it is easy to be intimidated by the "big" authors. We don't know the fears or problems of another, but if you attend with a willingness to let God use you—He will. One of those "big" authors/editors/publishers just may need a word of encouragement--from you.

On the other hand, don't go thinking you know it all. You don't. If you don't go with an attitude of humility, of realizing there is always something more to learn, there really is no reason to attend at all. Is there?

Relax. Rest as much as possible before the conference. During the conference, especially if it lasts several days, take time out to rest, refresh, relax so you don't burn out and make hash out of that big, all-important meeting with a publisher.

Take time to get to know those around you. Reach out to those who seem less sure and confident.

Have fun. Don't take yourself too seriously, even if you make BIG mistakes. We've all been there—knocking on the wrong door and being reported to the hotel, being told to quiet down in the halls, laughing too loud, falling on our faces. It happens.

Finally, take what you've learned and, as soon as possible, incorporate it into your writing. If you promised someone a critique, a manuscript, a letter—don't put it off. Show that you are a professional by the way you keep your promises.

Attend the right conference for you, register early, pray before, during and after, cultivate a positive, servant attitude, get enough rest, relax, have fun, use what you learned, and always be professional.

Want to keep you sanity during a writer's conference? It boils down to this—letting God use you in whatever circumstances you find yourself. If you forget your own fears and let Him guide, you will not only be awake and keep your sanity, but also return home with the joy of Lord inside.

Carolyn R. Scheidies is a journalist with a regular issues column, author of over two-dozen books, who quest lectures at UNK on writing for the media, and speaks to a variety of groups on a variety of topics from writing, and disability to hope.