

Dear Reader.

I hope that like me, your New Year has brought you renewed energy as well as some brand-new ideas on how to express yourselves. I am working steadily on my next novel in the Kowalsky family series. This one takes place ten years after *Timberlands* in the lead-up to American involvement in World War II. Middle sister Hilda is the heroine, chasing her dream of becoming an actress until events collide to side-track her career.

I am simultaneously working on another juvenile nonfiction book, the Civil War story of a remarkable Black woman who spied for the Union Army while living in the Confederate South. I'm aiming for a middle grade readership, and I have just begun my research.

My method for working on two books at the same time is this: my critique group meets once per month, and my goal is to produce a new chapter of my novel for each meeting. Once I've finished the chapter for that month's meeting, I am free to continue researching the background for the other book. For me, alternating between the two projects keeps me on task with both of them and free of getting stymied on either one.

So that I don't just hide away by myself and write all day, my dog Roscoe and I have been visiting The Pavilion, a memory care facility here in El Dorado Hills, every Monday morning for the past month. I'm sure that a great number of my readers have experienced the pain of losing a loved one to Alzheimer's disease, as have I. The smiles that Roscoe brings to the faces of otherwise silent residents as they reach out to pet him fill me with gratitude that I can do this one small thing for them. Good dog, Roscoe!

Blessings,

Jenifer