Writer's tips from Carmine Coco De Young

"One's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions." -- Oliver Wendell Holmes

You have a great idea for a story. Is it fiction or nonfiction? Is it a story idea for adults or one that will intrigue children? What genre will it fall into – mystery, science fiction, historical fiction, or one of the many others? The truth is you may experience difficulty in writing if you try to categorize your story too soon.

Tip #1: EXTRAPOLATE
My favorite word is a way to stretch my mind and make room for new ideas. That word is EXTRAPOLATE...taking the ordinary, giving it a twist and turning it into the extraordinary.   EXTRAPOLATE, extrapolate, extrapolate and set your mind free-ee! This is especially important to those who want to write fiction. Take your idea and keep asking, "What if?" This simple technique can turn an ordinary idea into something extraordinary, yet remain believable to the reader.

Tip #2: FIND A WORD
Is there a word that tickles your brain or makes you chuckle? The word curmudgeon best describes a grouchy person and always makes me chuckle. Curmudgeon is also used to describe a person who is ill-tempered or stubborn. Do you know any curmudgeons?

Here is a suggestion that will surely cure writer's block, which is a situation that often causes writers to become curmudgeonly. Find a word that tickles your brain, and begin writing about why it makes you chuckle. Next, think of someone or something that fits with that word and continue writing why or how the two match. Before you know it, you will have a full page of writing.

Tickling your brain will get the creative juices flowing in the process of writing. Have fun!

TIP #3: DISCOVER A NEW IDEA
Reread the advice of Mr. Holmes quoted above. Let that new idea tickle your brain. It is very important to keep a pad and pen handy to jot down your thoughts. Like any good tickle, it lasts for a moment then is gone!

TIP #4: WRITER'S WEB
Still feeling a bit befuddled? Try the writer's web. Some may call it clustering. Start with a single word or idea and write it in the middle of the paper. As more words come to mind, build the web by adding and connecting those words or thoughts - make them things you know about the subject. Look at the

example below. The word "trains" is at the center. Look at the many possibilities for a story as the web branches out. This exercise took two minutes and thirty seconds.
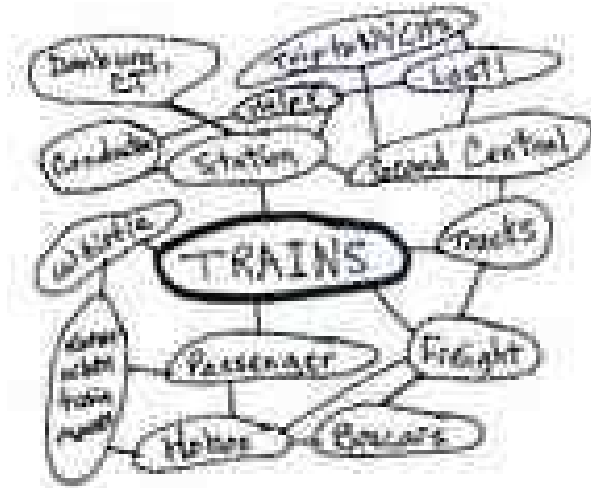
A-ha...caught you! Did you think you were done? Now go back and create a new web. This time use the same word in the center. However, expand the web by writing in those things about the subject that are unfamiliar to you; things that you wonder about. Now do the research. It was while researching a topic for *A Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt* that I discovered the idea for my next middle-grade novel.

TIP #5: CHARACTERIZATION
Can your main character carry an entire story on his/her shoulders? Here are some questions to help build a character's emotional traits.

1. What is his/her overall goal in the story?
2. Who or what stands in the way of this goal being achieved?
3. What will happen if the main character does not achieve this goal?
4. What is the character's greatest strength? What is the character's greatest weakness or flaw?
5. Who or what frightens the character?
6. Does the character have a secret?
7. Does the character have a dream?
8. Who or what does the character love?
9. Who or what does the character hate?

"Motivation is the business of supplying your fictional character with plausible reasons for them to act as you would have them act in order for your stories to be dramatically effective." -- Lawrence Block