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Elaine Marie Alphin's Thoughts on the Writing and Reading Life

About Me



ELAINE MARIE
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I wanted to be a writer since I was a little girl walking on weekend mornings with my father. We'd tell each other stories we'd made up, and I decided that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. How lucky can you get? I've been doing it ever since. I've also moved a lot, which has given me plenty to write about - I've lived in San Francisco, New York City, Houston TX, York (England) upstate New York, Southern Indiana, midstate Wyoming, midstate South Dakota, and Bozeman MT.

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2010

Resurrection is Hard Work

I've just finished going over the final layout pages for the re-issue of my very first book for young readers, *Ghost Cadet*, about the Battle of New Market during the War Between the States. It's going to be beautiful! But I hadn't expected it to be so much work to bring this book back to life for the teachers who had been clamoring for its return (it's used in curriculum in many schools, and their class sets were falling apart).

I had assumed that it was a simple matter of re-printing the text of the original version, once I got the rights back from the original publisher who let it go out of print. After all, that's what friends have done when they self-pubbed a new edition of one of their books that has gone out of print, or went through one of the Author's Guild or SCBWI recommended publishers to re-issue one of their OP books, usually through Print on Demand. But I figured it would be a better plan to go to a legitimate publisher who actually knew something about children's books and marketing and such important details.

Paula Morrow at [Boxing Day Books](#) agreed to bring back *Ghost Cadet*, on a standard royalty arrangement, with a regular print run instead of POD, which made the cover price much more reasonable for children (and schools, especially given budget cuts). But instead of just re-printing the original text, she reminded me that her job was editing, and she challenged



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me to actually do some revision, including bringing the text up to date.

At first I wasn't sure about changing a book that had been so successful as it was. I was also concerned that making any changes would make it harder for teachers who probably still used their old hardcover books to read to their students. Plus, it meant more work. But a lot of the points Paula raised made sense. This wasn't a book set in the 1990's; it was always intended to be set in the reader's "now." So I needed to add a generation between the War Between the States (Civil War, to my non-Southern readers) and the present. And, obviously, the twentieth-century had to become the twenty-first century.

Once I started making changes like that, I loosened up and found myself following her guidance and updating and revising many details in the book. There was a poetic sentence I'd always liked, but I'd also always wondered if it really fit the tone of the rest of the book. Without my asking, Paula pointed out that it didn't, so that sentence got cut. There was also a question that students always asked about how the ghost had done something important in the very first chapter - Paula asked the same question, so I made changes throughout the text to answer it this time around.

The new *Ghost Cadet* isn't a different book, but it's more contemporary book for twenty-first century readers, and it's worth all the time I've taken away from my Work-In-Progress to revise, check the copyedited ms. ellipsis by comma by exclamation point (who knew I'd used so many exclamation points when I was a younger, less experienced writer?!?), work through the galleys, and write lots of e-mails. *Ghost Cadet* is on its way to the printer now, and Boxing Day Books will have it available by May, in good time for New Market Day. The time spent on this book, and the work invested in it, is a reminder that the writing and revision and publishing process is always hard work - but always worth it.

Posted by Elaine Marie Alphin at [9:43 AM](#)

Labels: [Battle of New Market](#) , [Boxing Day Books](#) , [Ghost Cadet](#) , [Paula Morrow](#) , [Revision](#) , [Writing](#)

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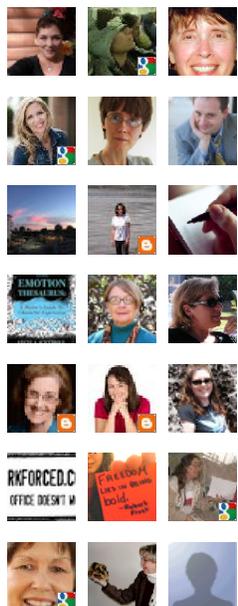


Peni R. Griffin [March 17, 2010 at 3:59 PM](#)

Great googly moogly! Now I can get me a copy, all updated and stuff. You realize that future Alphin collectors will have to spend thousands of dollars on E-bay to get the original, though.

I'm soooo glad you did your own updating. When Penelope Farmer's *Charlotte Sometimes* was reissued, instead of either leaving the book alone or adding in a generation, whoever updated the text just dropped the connection between the student who greets Charlotte and Emily from the past sequences. Ham-handed crap and left me still having to hunt up an older edition (which I have now, but still).

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Elaine Marie Alphin March 17, 2010 at 5:03 PM

Ouch! That's painful about "Charlotte Sometimes" - Now I appreciate even more that Paula worked with me to do the updating!

It's really difficult to find the original anymore - I've got only about half a dozen or so hardcovers left, and maybe 10 paperbacks. Just think how wealthy I could get in 10 or 20 years if I decided to sell a couple! :) Well, it's a nice thought anyway.

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Kate M. April 7, 2010 at 3:33 PM

Glad I have my original safely stowed! I just recommended this book (and your others) to some friends with young boys the age mine were when you first published GC, so I will wait for the new edition to come out and get them one of those. Reminds me of the updates done for Nancy Drew et al. to keep them "current" - I am trying to collect one of each generation of the first title in several of the sets. Congrats on the re-issue.

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Elaine Marie Alphin April 8, 2010 at 9:24 PM

Thanks, Kate! I didn't modernize Benjy nearly as much as Nancy Drew got updated - but Fran has a iPod, and is ticked off that their mother can't afford for her to have a cell phone. Fran would want to modernize, but Benjy wants to stay Benjy. And Miss Leota, of course, remains Miss Leota. It's just a relief to have the book back in print for another generation to read!

And my new novel's first draft is very nearly finished - once that's done I'll try to catch you up on what's been going on.

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Kristine M. July 29, 2013 at 1:36 PM

I am a 4th grade teacher whose students really enjoy reading the Ghost Cadet. Last year I had to borrow copies from several different schools to have a class set. This year I have been trying to purchase a set so that I can make sure we can read this fabulous book every year. However, I can't find anywhere that will sell me a set of 25. Can you offer any assistance?

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