

THE WRITING LIFE

by Bobbi Linkemer

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Shadow Stories

What do writers do with their published work? Do they carefully bind it into portfolios and stack it reverently on their bookshelves? Do they file it away in cabinets or plastic file boxes until it takes over half their houses? Or do they simply pitch it into the recycling bin and go on to the next assignment? I think the answer has a lot to do with how much they are identified with their work. Personally, I am pretty much defined by mine.

It should come as no surprise that I have kept every article and book I've ever written, in all of the above places: portfolios, bookshelves, and plastic file boxes. Over the years, I've done my best to consolidate, organize, and even purge: but I still have a lot of printed material.

When I leave this planet, what are my children going to do with a collection of 40 or 50 or 60 years of accumulated words? I have no idea, really. They can throw it out if they

like. I wouldn't mind at all. After all, I am not a famous writer, and what I've written has not changed the world in any way I know of. So, why keep it?

Perhaps I keep it because it is tangible proof of what I have done with my life ... that I haven't just been sitting around twiddling my thumbs. Or maybe it is all an extension of me in some way I don't completely understand. And there is another reason. Behind every story, I've written there is another story, a shadow story, so to speak. It is a story of what happened while I was researching or writing, of the real people behind the carefully phrased quotes, and of what I learned or experienced that never made it into print.

It's funny; sometimes, I can't remember what I did yesterday. Yet, I can clearly recall every one of those shadow stories behind the ones that made it into magazines and books. Perhaps it's time to bring them into the light.