

Sister Scribes



With no rules, no set plans, and minimum discussion on the storyline; my sister and I set out on the task to write a novel together. Anyone that knows me knows that while I feel I'm a good storyteller I'm not necessarily a good writer. My sister is the real writer in the family. When people find out that we're both authors, their first question is, have you written anything together? Several people who have read both our works thought we had similar writing styles. I didn't agree, but found it fascinating, which was one of the reasons I brought the idea of collaborating to my sister, Jenetta.

The project was an interesting and challenging experience overall. The minimal discussion of the storyline kept things exciting, but it also created challenges. Eighty percentage of the time when I write, the entire story is in my head before the pen hits the

paper. Since we hadn't mapped out the story, all I could do was cross my fingers and hope she saw where I was headed. Sometimes she wrote just enough to screw me up as far as getting to my next plot point. This forced me to revamp and reflow the story in my head. One time she killed off a character that I'd plotted some major points for and it forced me to manipulate the details back toward my desired ending. I must confess, I had a little fun at my sister's expense ending my portion at her least favorite type of scene to write, just to see how she'd wriggled out of writing it. After we finished the novel, we laughed about the curve balls we threw each other throughout the process.

The biggest challenge we faced was not having full control of the story. Once I wrote my portion

and emailed it to my sister, I'd have to wait patiently until it was returned. Sometimes, I had to wait so long that trying to get back into the flow was like starting an old, unused car in the dead of Chicago winter. We had a huge hiccup on the road to publishing when we discovered we couldn't use the original title. It linked to a "live girl" website and would have been a promotional nightmare. The process of coming up with a new title was frustrating. I favored one. She favored another. We had to work through it until we could both agree on one that worked.

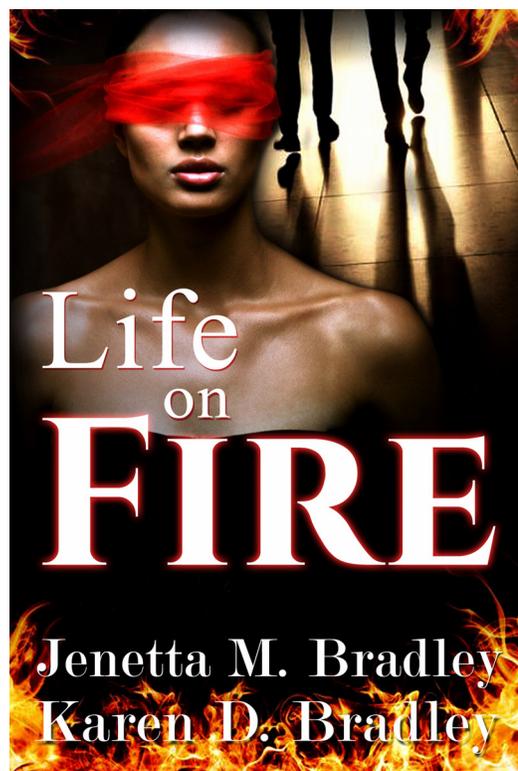
When I came up with the idea of writing a novel with my sister, it was really about seeing if she'd continue to make time for the thing she loves as well as making writing fun again. Life happened and at some points in time she was writing less and less. She made it sound like writing had become a chore. The title changed to *Life on Fire* which was fitting because I wanted her to set my sister's life ablaze only in the best of ways and burn down anything holding her back. I didn't want Jenetta to settle into her new norm, but continuously reevaluate and readjust to get back on track to the targeted outcome. My sister's past cannot be altered but I could hand her a match in hopes she'd relight her flame and attempt to introduce her to people who I knew could add fuel to her fire or fan the flames. The responsibility of controlling the blaze, or the lack thereof, is on her. Same way it comes to being on me in my own life.

Though as a person who encourages others to do their level best, we want people's talents and skills to set the world on fire and blaze across the sky touching and changing lives along the way. Yet, we can't keep throwing fuel on the fire if the person is mentally not ready. An uncontrolled blaze is a wildfire that leaves destruction in its wake.

The experience tested my limits, taught new lessons and pushed me outside of my comfort zone. It also reminded me to be patient with myself during the process of moving out of my own way. The goal is to live life full-out, not to be consumed and devastated by the attempt. However, there are times when life will require people to step out

of their comfort zone when they're not ready then learn and grow as they go.

Producing *Life on Fire* with Jenetta was an enlightening experience from the writing process to hosting panel discussions in two different cities on the same day. It allowed me to take opportunities that I would have declined had I wrote the novel alone. The process also reminded me of the importance of being surrounded by people who aid and abet in our goals. My most important take-away was that life isn't about having full control but having the ability to be fluid with our plans as things continuously change to still accomplish goals.



Karen D. Bradley has penned several contemporary fiction novels—Shattered Illusions, Love Runs Deep, and Life on Fire. Recently, she ventured into film making by writing and producing a short film based on one of her novels. Visit Karen on the web at www.karendbradley.com