

What's a "Plantser"?

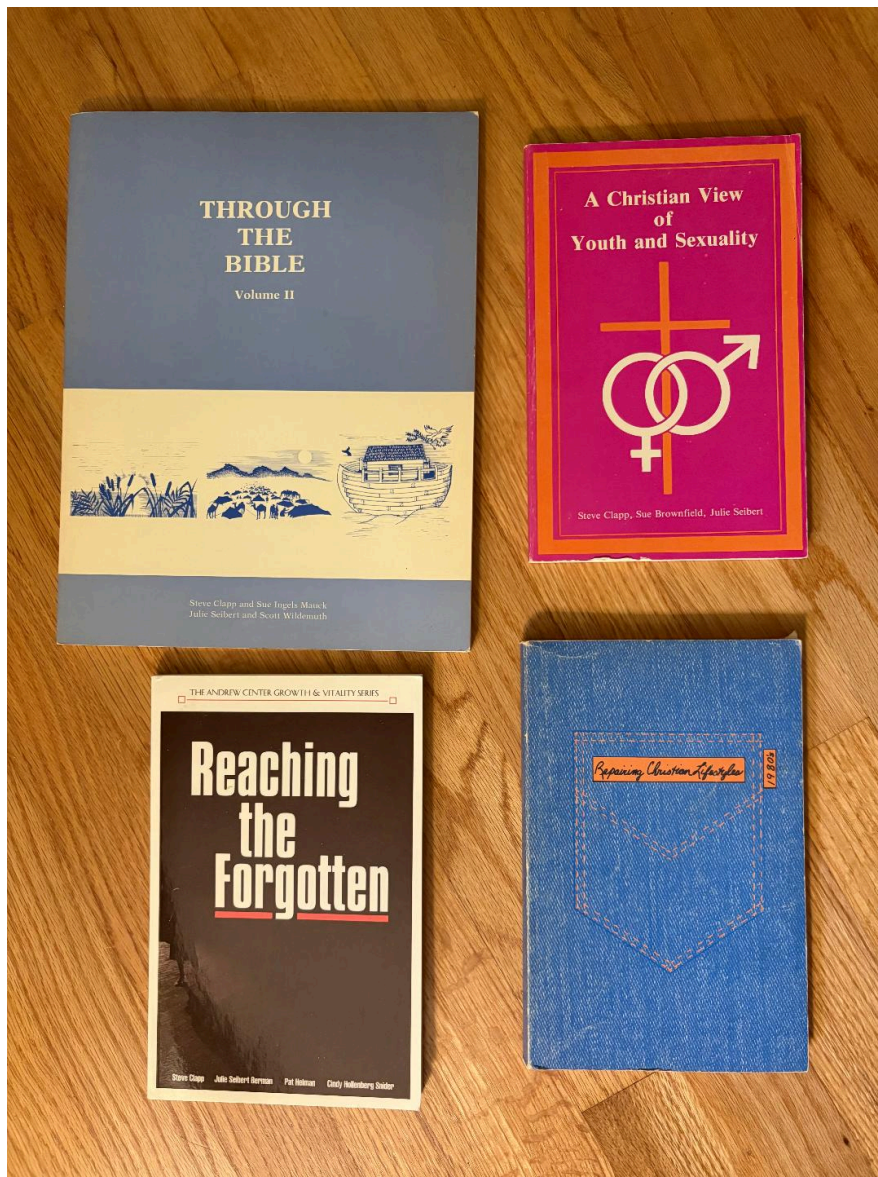
June 2026

When I retired, I had this crazy idea that I wanted to write a novel. I hadn't thought of myself as a creative writer. I didn't write poetry and stories from age eight like some authors. I've never uttered the phrase "I just can't NOT write."

I got a blue electric Smith Corona typewriter for Christmas when I was in high school (my sister Ronna got a brown one—mine was prettier). I used it for essays for school, but still didn't do much creative writing.



I co-authored some nonfiction books (Christian education materials) as a young adult, and did lots of professional writing during my career.



It wasn't until I retired that I decided to try writing stories.

Boredom was my fear. I have slug tendencies. I like the comfort of my Lay-Z-Boy recliner with its preprogrammed settings for the recline angle, footrest, headrest, and lumbar support. I like reading. I like TV shows like Ted Lasso and the Great British Baking Show. I was afraid I would feel unproductive when I stopped going to work every day as a speech-language pathologist. I needed a concrete goal and a routine.

The mechanics of writing (spelling, grammar, word usage) have always been fairly easy for me, but I wanted to try my hand at creating something, maybe a story about resilience, faith, community, love, and joy. I figured the world could use more of those.

I immersed myself in reading about writing and attending workshops about writing. I learned about plotters and pantsers. **Plotters** map out their story before writing it. This may involve complex outlines, character profiles, and timelines. **Pantsers** “fly by the seat of their pants”. They start with a kernel of an idea or a character, and the story unfolds as they write. Some mystery writers don’t even know “who done it” until they get to the end!

I think I’m between a plotter and a pantsers, which I have dubbed a “**plantser**” (I have since found out that I’m far from the first to come up with that). I make an outline, but I definitely stray from it,

sometimes going where the story leads me.

For my first novel, I researched plotting structures, downloaded templates, and decided on the “Save the Cat” method (originally developed for screenwriters by Blake Snyder and adapted for novels by Jessica Brody). I created a “beat sheet”, a basic outline of the major plot points in a three-act structure. “Save the Cat” refers to a pivotal early scene where a flawed or unlikable protagonist does something inherently good and heroic—like literally saving a cat from a tree or a dangerous situation—to instantly win over the audience's sympathy. Hence my scene when grumpy Sam reveals his tender side when the dog Scotty was hit by a car.

By the way, it's been a year since my book launch party! Hard to believe. What a fun day that was.



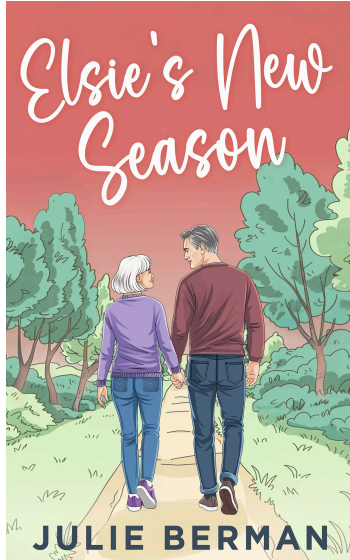
Anyway, the Save the Cat structure helped me immensely with my first novel, but it doesn't really lend itself to romance. For my second novel I am using the Basic Romance Outline by Julie Spencer as a rough but not strict guide.

This one is taking longer to write. I find my life is full of travel to see family, lots of girlfriend time with lots of girlfriends, volunteering, church activities, walking, classes/workshops, etc. I had no idea I would be so busy in my retirement years. On top of all that, I am promoting my book on social media, networking with other writers, attending conferences, giving talks, and writing newsletters!

I'm determined, though, and book two is coming along in fits and starts. In an upcoming newsletter I will provide a sneak peek of the story, with two new main characters I hope you will love as much as I do.

I appreciate your support:

- Recommend Elsie's New Season to a friend or give as a gift (it's a great beach read)!



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Julie

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