

SLWG Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

**Anne Marie Apollo-Noel**



**Freelance Writer, SLWG Spotlight Editor**

**SLWG Member Since 2009**

Somewhere over the Mississippi border, just past 3 a.m., one of the trucks in our convoy popped a tire. We had been on the road for almost 24 hours. It had been at least five since we'd seen another car headed where we were going: into the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Even when the sun rose, there wouldn't be a service station open for a hundred miles.

Out in the darkness, as the storm's final bands pummeled them with rain, two sheriff's deputies walked a line around the convoy, their rifles drawn. There were reports of looters at the next exit. Many of the vehicles in our group, the semi-trucks full of food and water and tanker of gasoline, were armed. I was not. Within an hour, we'd be back on the road. The sun would rise and when it did, I would start a week of reporting on one of the country's worst natural disasters. But at the moment, unsure of when I'd be able to rest again, or where, I crawled onto the pile of provisions I'd crammed into my SUV and fell asleep.

It's a good thing my mother didn't know what I was up to.

For years, I made my living going into situations from which most sane people would steer clear. Murder scenes. Grisly interstate pile-ups. Hurricanes. City council and school board meetings. College had prepared me well for journalism. Awake by mid-morning after a night of drinking, I was often the

first person in the newsroom and the last to leave the bar that night. I'd never made any money before, so my paycheck, which made a first-year teacher's salary look attractive, didn't disappoint. I wasn't there to get rich. I was there for the story. Reporting was my life.

Two years after Hurricane Katrina, I started what, for me, was a pretty typical assignment. A fire had been raging across North Florida for days. It had reached the outskirts of a tiny town. Emergency workers were attacking the blaze from logging roads and issued me an invitation: would I like to go inside the fire?

I've always found a sort of beauty in destruction. There is chaos there, but order too. Walking amid the ruins of Waveland, Mississippi, near where Katrina made landfall, I was fascinated to find that though a china hutch had splintered and the dining room that housed it had washed away, a delicate tea cup would have settled into the sludge, unbroken. Fire is like that too. One part of a forest will burn, and then the flames will jump across one road but not another in a pattern not obvious to us.

I went into the fire that day, but unlike that wet night in Mississippi, I didn't want to stay. The unknown didn't invigorate me; it scared me. The next time the police scanner bleated out a shooting, I would wonder how many more nightmares my spirit would witness. By the time a devastating earthquake hit Haiti this winter, other people's tragedies were no longer mine to tell. I read with interest the articles filed by reporters from my former paper but did not envy their dark nights by the side of the road. My story had changed, I believe for the better.

### **About Anne Marie Apollo-Noel**

With more than 10 years of experience in the media and communications industry, Anne Marie Apollo-Noel is a freelance writer and consultant specializing in the editorial and social media needs of not-for-profit agencies and small businesses. Prior to her move to St. Louis, she led editorial communications for the Multiple Sclerosis Foundation, a national nonprofit group based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

A 2000 graduate of the Missouri School of Journalism, she has reported on issues of public policy, safety, health and social services at the Sun-Times Media Group (Chicago, Ill.) the Naples Daily News (Naples, Fla.) and the Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville, Fla.). Her work has also appeared on Chicago Public Radio and outlets for D Custom Publications.

She is at work on her first novel, *Too Beautiful*.

### **Connect with Anne Marie Apollo-Noel**

#### **LinkedIn**

<http://www.linkedin.com/in/annemarieapollonoel>

#### **Twitter**

twitter.com/AnneMarieApollo

#### **Web**

www.get-refocused.com