My self induced insomnia started when I was about thirteen years old. At the time, I had an old computer in my room that couldn’t play games or music. It couldn’t hook up to the internet or support any program loaded onto it. It was solely for playing solitaire and word processing.

One day I had a great idea: I would write a novel.

Right away, I realized that there would probably be problems with this idea. First off, usually any of my big ideas ended up badly. As in, it would end with me being frustrated, angry, and most likely without money. Other problems were that I had no idea how to write a novel, how much time and effort it would take, what I do with it when I finished, or why anyone would read it.

As if I would let that stop me.

Nearly every night, I sat at my computer and would hammer at the keyboard until I was too tired to focus on the screen or until my father would pound on my door at 2 AM to tell me to go to sleep. I would lie in my bed and slowly process whatever I had written for the next hour or so until I finally fell asleep. I would get up a few hours later for school. This sleep deprived schedule would ingrain itself into my body’s clock and would dictate my sleeping habits for years afterwards.

I completely rebuilt my computer just so I could work on my story. I reformatted the hard drive so the computer wouldn’t crash every other time I tried to save. I put in a brand new sound card and installed an MP3 player so I could listen to music while I wrote. There were hours and
hours of music that what I called “The Soundtrack.” It was made up mostly of instrumental and non-English music in order to keep me from typing the words to songs. To this day, I keep the same habit of listening to certain kinds of music while I work.

Now I have always been a fantasy and science fiction reader. Of course my novel would be something I enjoyed. But first, I had to build my own world. So while I worked on the technological problems and began the first few chapters, I was accumulating a series of notebooks. These were the keystones. Each spiral bound notebook held a part of what was needed for this new world. They became my physics textbook and my blueprints as I wrote out a new universe. This new world would have many of the same principles that our world had, such as similar physics and older technology, but would have the bonus of magic and alchemy. In these spiral bound notebooks, there was the science and the logic behind of magic or the evolution of elves or sketches of clockwork robots. There were witches, and curses, but also trains and zeppelins. It was a mixture of what little I knew of physics, chemistry, history, and technology.

The characters were fragments of my personality that I shaped into full beings. My cynical and dark sense of humor became a lonely assassin. The arrogant and bookworm parts of me became a genius who specialized in mechanics. My optimism and want to do good appeared in the form of the heroine, a naïve and daydreaming soldier. These characters were like my children, only better. Unlike real children, I could determine what they did and how they would turn out. These people had lives I wished I could have led. They had dangerous and exciting adventures. They would go to the brink of death and come back with stories to tell. They saved the world, made it a better place, lived gloriously, and were heroes.
The story was the oldest kind: good versus evil. The underdogs overthrow the powerful and the tyrannical. A small group of unlikely heroes save ungrateful mankind, all in the name of love, justice, and freedom.

I loved this new world. Everything was exactly how I wanted it to be. Everyone lived their lives as I thought they should. To me, everything was perfect.

This was a serious case of a God complex, the want and need to play God, to control the world, and to have everything the way as one believed it should be. Like most forms of power, it can be seriously addicting.

About eight months later, I had 130 pages, single spaced with 10 point font.

Not a word of it was fit to print.

The more I reread and edited, the more disappointed I became. The majority of what was written could be described as word vomit; a steady, unfiltered stream of whatever I had been thinking at the time. The writing was disjointed where I had gone back to fix parts written months earlier. The plot was predictable and overused. Anything that was supposed to be funny came across as lame. My descriptions were lengthy and often useless. If I had been in a bad mood, I would have misfortune strike a character without adding anything to the story.

Like most thirteen year olds, my self esteem was fragile. My heart broke as my story fell apart before my eyes. All the red ink in the world could not save that story, despite my best efforts. All this time I had thought that it was great, that I was special, and that this novel would be a great work of art. Before rereading my story, I had been so prideful that I had not even considered the fact that it might not be as wonderful as I had thought it would be.
I was mortified at my own writing. Even though not another soul read it, I was embarrassed that anyone might know that I produced such dreck. This was my humiliating secret that I could not let anyone ever see.

My hard copy went in the trash. The notebooks were recycled. The computer file was erased.

After that, I stuck to writing short stories. I knew I was decent enough at writing short stories. Nonetheless, paranoia crept in while I wrote, forcing me to reread my work three or four times before I could let my closest friends even have a first glance. I was worried that I was once again overestimating myself and should anyone see my work, they would see me for the sham of a writer that I was.

A couple years ago, a friend named Kristin asked me whatever to my big writing project. I asked why she remembered me mentioning such a thing. She said that she wondered if I had ever finished my novel. So I told Kristin about the resulting manuscript and my reaction. She told me that it was amazing that I produced something so complete, while most people who try will give up and walk away, leaving their books unfinished at chapter three.

That moment was my epiphany. Kristin was right. As horrible as it might have been, how many adults, let alone teenagers, could claim that they wrote a whole novel? As horrible as my story was, there were far worse novels out there that had been published. As horrible as my reaction, I had the ability to tell what was good writing and bad.

I wish I could claim that I wrote another novel, much better than the first, but since I have gotten older, the more distractions have come into my life. But since all the blueprints for that universe are still in my memory, I might feel like playing God again.

As horrible as my novel was, I have to admit that it sure was fun.