

# What would Chekhov do?

## (Exercising Your Way to Fame and Fiction)

By

John Dufresne



*An imprint of*

**Madison Avenue Publishing, Inc.**

*New York, New York*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment

### *Making a List, Checking It Twice*

Maybe it's that I'm somewhat obsessive/compulsive, or maybe it's that I know I'll forget whatever is so important in two minutes (or maybe that's the same thing), but I make lists. (Lists were perhaps the first written literature. [If you think maybe "literature" is stretching it, remember that there are great list poems; think of the *Iliad*, the Bible; think of Whitman.] Long before the divine list that Moses carried down from the mountain, and before Hammurabi's list of laws, someone probably scratched something about cleaning the cave, planting the wheat, hunting the mammoth, and gathering the firewood.) I have lists of possible story titles, interesting names, lists of things I have to do. My characters make lists. I used to worry about this behavior, but these days I wonder how people get along without their lists. How do they know what to pick up at Winn-Dixie? Lists free you up to think about more important things, to daydream. Anyway, many of us do keep shopping lists, Christmas card lists, guest lists, birthday lists, and lists can be helpful for getting in touch with your useable past and with your obsessions.

So here are some lists for you to make in your writer's notebook:

- List all of the friends you've ever had. Put an "x" beside those you've lost contact with. Put a "y" beside the "x" for people you'd like to see again.
- List all of the pets you have ever had, even the short-lived goldfish from Woolworth's and the little turtle that turned into cardboard overnight. (He never made it up the ramp to his plastic palm tree.)
- List all of the moments you'd live over again for whatever reason. (To get them right this time. To enjoy them afresh.)
- List everything you've ever done that you are ashamed

of.

- List every object that you've ever lost.
- List the best meals that you've ever eaten. And now describe them using all of your senses.
- List the toys and games that you owned as a child.
- List your favorite songs. Remember listening to them for the first time.
- List your favorite smells. Are there smells you despise?
- List your goals for the next five years. Prioritize them.

Take five-ten minutes on each list initially. The lists will suggest events, emotions, and people you haven't thought about in a while. What else do they suggest? Use the lists in the coming days for sources of material for your fiction.

## **End of 2<sup>nd</sup> Installment**