

five lines



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Keep Writing - Keep Writing

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It's days like these when I begin to question myself.

Am I really a writer?

Because I've been staring at the blankness in front of me for well over two hours now and nada, zip, zilch, zero, a big fat void of nothingness stares back.

I try to get myself going, try to think up some interesting topic, try to think of something that happened today that might be worth mentioning, but the thinking is just making my head hurt even worse than it already was and I've already taken five Extra Strength Tylenol. At this point, my eyes are starting to cross and tear up

from fatigue and I am seriously considering just calling it a night and going to bed and congratulating myself on making it through 282 days of a 365 Project before I gave up.

Ah, but I come from a very long line of very stubborn stock. I started this project wanting to get back in the habit of writing, and so far it has been working. Of course, I should expect the occasional hiccup. So, I must press on.

I dive in tonight the way I have for so many years, free writing, just letting the thoughts flow from my brain without purpose, without direction, without a well-formulated plan. And when I get stuck...

Keep writing. Keep writing. Keep writing.

The mantra has pushed me through so many difficult assignments, so many bottomless pits of self-doubt over the years. It's that repetitive voice that has kept me from giving up on this dream of being a writer.

Keep writing. Keep writing. Keep writing, because the words are always there, if I can just find them.

So, what is it about writing? Why does writing survive? Why does it



Spring 2012

move us? Inspire us? Anger us? Bore us? Why do readers keep reading? Why do writers keep writing? To me, it has always seemed that life and writing are all about reactions. Every day, we are faced with dozens of conflicts and situations that we must react to and deal with and, sometimes, even overcome, and the best writing reflects that. Writing connects us to our fellow human beings and helps us make sense of chaos.

Just think of how different our lives would be if there were no surprises, no conflict, if we could move through our daily existence like robots, never having to respond to anything out of the ordinary. But it's not so easy. At some point, we are all faced with monumental moments, grand life-changing events in which our lives suddenly do an abrupt about-face. Just think how different life would be, if we could somehow be notified of these changes. What if there were bells, whistles, and phone calls to alert you of the impending doom? What if we could receive a note, something like this?

Please take a moment to stop what you are doing and prepare yourself. Today, your life, as you know it, is going to change completely. Take a deep breath, and sit down if you feel faint. Thank you for your attention.

*Signed,
The Management*

Would writing or poetry or art have a place in such a world? If there were no glitches or conflicts or surprises in life, would the writer find it more difficult to create? I think that it is life's unpredictability that gives writers the freedom to ask that all important question, "What if?" A writer is only restrained by the power of his/her own imagination.

There is not a simple formula to explain what it is that writers choose to write about. There is no list of acceptable or interesting topics for a writer to choose from when they write. Instead, each writer tells a unique story each time he/she sits down to fill a blank page. Topics, themes, characters, style—the choices are infinite. One poet may write about the beautiful sunrise he witnessed that morning, while another writes about a world ravaged by war. For me, that is the most exciting thing about writing—anything goes. And there is always a new story just begging to be told.

It's not an easy journey, the journey of the writer. As a child in elementary school, I remember how everyone used to say it was so cute the way I was always imagining and writing stories, the adventurous webs I

would weave with my closest friends in the starring roles. Sometime around junior high, the novelty wore off, and writing wasn't so cute anymore. It was something I began to hide like a dirty secret.

Later, in high school, I remember vividly the first time I told someone that I planned to be a writer and major in English and Creative Writing in college. She just nodded and smiled blankly with an "Oh, that's nice, but what are you going to do for a **real** job?"

Yeah, that one hurt. I still hear that voice sometimes when I meet someone for the first time and they ask me what I do. As a writer and a photographer, I'm just picking my poison when I introduce myself.

Is writing any less "real" than building houses or waiting tables or selling insurance? Does writing really have a purpose? Or is the writer just a child chasing an improbable dream? If writing truly serves no purpose, why does it survive? Why do we still pore over Shakespeare's plays or analyze Yeats' poems? Why do people spend so much time debating books like *The DaVinci Code* or spend so much money collecting every book ever written by Stephen King or J.K. Rowling?

During one of my poetry classes in grad school, we started talking about the narcissism of the writer, and it really got me thinking about the motivation behind writing. Is writing really a selfish act? Does the writer simply seek attention, using words as a peacock uses its brilliant plumage in an attempt to dazzle the audience?

Perhaps.

But there is also something more to it.

For me, reading gave me glimpses into other worlds, allowed me to walk in someone else's shoes for awhile. Reading even altered my beliefs and opinions a few times. On the other hand, writing allowed me to share pieces of myself with other people, allowing them to take a moment to see the world from where I stood. Writing gave this somewhat shy, introverted girl a voice when she was too scared to say the words out loud.

I'm intrigued by this idea of the writer constantly delving into the psyche in an attempt to dig deeper and deeper into his/herself. Just what is it that the writer is digging for? What rare jewel lies buried, waiting to be discovered? For me, writing has always been an emotional excavation, a way to work through pain, to capture joy, to dilute anger, and to clear up confusion. Is it healthy, all of this digging and purging of emotions? Or is the writer a tortured soul, destined to self-destruct and die prematurely from stress-related illnesses or self-inflicted means? Is writing therapy or something more akin to a medieval torture device designed to break down and destroy?

Spring 2012

For me, writing was always more of a therapeutic adventure. I always had a much easier time expressing myself in my writing. It seemed whenever I would try to speak, the words would get tangled somewhere between my brain and my lips. I could just never quite get it right. But the opposite would happen when I would sit down with a blank notebook and a pen. Suddenly, all of the right words seemed to materialize, sometimes faster than I could write them. Writing was always the one thing I was sure of in my life. Even if I never “made it” as a writer, even if no one else ever read or wanted to publish anything I ever wrote, just holding one of my own stories or poems was the closest I could ever come to seeing my own soul, to actually holding a piece of it in my hand.

I was always drawn to literature and poetry for the same reason. By reading the works of other writers, I felt a deeper connection, not only to the authors, but to myself and the world around me. Writers and poets have a way of capturing moments in life that are universal, that we can all relate to in one way or another.

Somehow, the best writers are able to see into our souls and record our own feelings on the page. Like a kindred spirit, the writer holds up a mirror into which we can gaze and see pieces of ourselves. Reading a good piece of writing can be an exceptionally intimate experience, and yet it somehow also helps us feel more connected to the people and the world around us.

Even as some pieces of writing seem to speak directly to my soul, I wonder how much of the writer’s message has been lost in translation. I’m not talking about just the translation from one language to another. There is also the translation from the page to my brain, and the translation from the writer’s own mind to the blank page before him/her.

Words, though they have a recorded definition, remain somewhat ambiguous. Readers are given the opportunity to explore and imagine and create within their own minds. The true beauty of writing lies in the infinite possibilities. Perhaps that, above all else, is the reason that writing survives. In this lightning fast, digital world where we are spoon-fed ideas and opinions through radio, television, internet, and media, writing is the one place where we are only bound by the limits of our own imaginations.

And so, tonight’s 365 Project is dedicated to all of the writers out there, all of those courageous souls who dare to dream and to share their unique vision of the world with everyone else. As long as there are writers who scribble words upon pages, there will be readers to read them. And that is enough of a reason to keep writing.

Keep writing.

Keep writing.