

Writing All Night

By Heather Severson

I wish I could write all night. I have so many dialogues or thoughts or observations to make but they all slip away into the recesses of vague memory. Well, some may be clear, but they will remain unrecorded. I want to craft pieces beyond this awkward drafting compulsion.

The blank page draws me on and on-- it sucks me in-- how do I tear myself away? Simply close the book and stop thinking about what is being lost as I simply reflect without a pen and paper? Nothing is wrong with simply lying back to THINK. Not all of existence can be captured this way-- and even if it could be, would it make my life last any longer? Would it bring me any closer to immortality? I doubt it very much. Yet still the urge is there to fill the page-- to keep making ink marks to darken the pure white of each page of this book, until it is swollen with my life, my words, my thoughts, my observations of other peoples' lives, words and actions as seen through the filter of my eyes, further filtered by my pen and the time it takes to write, and the inevitable shorthand and skipping-over that goes on because THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME TO WRITE EVERYTHING!!! All these concepts make me itch to sit down and react in my own pen strokes. Mental musings simply are not sufficient.

I am the protagonist, the heroine, the villain, the narrator of the story of my life. But a larger force directs the action and auditions the actors and actresses who enter my stage. I cannot be the playwright and director and set designer on top of my starring role. Why do I think I can?

The element of creativity still exists in my own way of shaping words. I'm taking the action as assigned and reacting. It's really an improv performance. That's it-- I'm just improvising, and the challenge is there to shape dialogue and poetic justice and irony and humor and exciting twists of plot and rising action and denouement for my audience--which is myself, ultimately, in the present and in the future as I read this play and react with the critic's objective stance that comes with the passage of time.

I feel like my journal writing is finally beginning to escape the mundane accounts I used to berate myself for, and is at last reaching toward reflection and growth and challenges for a writer. True, it is still rough and unrefined, but it gets to the essence of what I want to express far more often now. I suppose that's why I spend so much time in its pages. If any idea comes, I have to run with it. It makes me feel alive and awake and only now can I relish the vitality of creating and feeling like it is good. If true quality emerges at some point and in some form from these reflections then this feeling will be justified. Even if not, it's a pleasant sensation to enjoy in this moment while I have it running through my hand and the point of my pen.

How much of a blessing to be so overwhelmed by opportunities to read and write and think and travel and play and feel that I will never even get close to experiencing, much less capturing in words, any appreciable percentage of any one offering! Thank God for my good fortune! Ah, happiness! So beautifully I am immersed in it; how lovely to record it, even so ineffectually, so that I will one day look back at this kind of entry juxtaposed with the entries I have written in times of trouble that have made me cry as I reread them.

And so it goes. This evening will live on as long as my mind recalls its details, but the journal doesn't hold anything but the most superficial account of it-- a brief reminder to me, if I read it again... Even my most detailed journal entries are nothing but words and incomplete recollections. It's all over. It's gone. It's in the past. But the

events and characters of my life are forever inscribed upon the pages of my journal... at least as long as a piece of paper can hold up to forever. It's all so short-lived, and I spend *so much* time at it-- so much time, in a vain attempt to write it down, to make meaning, to prove the existence of my adventures. And the people I meet fall between the pages in incomplete portraits and brief structural outlines of personalities. I'm saddened by the insignificance of my greatest passion.

Handwriting captures a mood sometimes. Just look at how my own differs as I go from entry to entry. This journal is so far filled with large, sprawling, messy entries. I've been on the move, happy, contented, excited, so the words take up more space, are more sloppily spilled across the whiteness. In heavier, more pensive times, I suspect the words are cramped as I try to put the most meaning into the same space I am so careless with when I am happy. And the pen I choose is usually indicative of something... tonight I write in red... inspired by thoughts of passion or intrigue? Some kind of mystery?

My red bedside carnation-- another reason to write in red ink-- stands to remind me of the randomness and beauty of human kindness and impulse. It reminds me that so many things are out of my hands the way I meet people, the lovers and friends who come into and pass out of my immediate circle, but never leave my life once they enter. Even the kindness of that man in the grocery store yesterday, with his red suspenders and longish tawny hair and glasses, who offered me the flower so matter-of-factly—he is forever etched into my experience as much as the account of his actions are etched onto these pages in ink.

This is my thanks and my revenge to the people and events that come along as I live out my days on earth. What glorious celebration, what dismal persecution. I suppose the worst would be total indifference. If I left someone out of my journal, that might be the worst treatment. Temporary curses and vilifications (temporary in that they come from passing moods) are at least recognition. I haven't ever, as far as I know, despised anyone or anything enough to leave out a description of some kind if it was important to me. I never censor what I write in here, not by consciously choosing *not* to write about someone or something. If anything, idleness or authentic indifference leaves out notable events. But if they are *that* notable, they will find their way in here despite time constraints and lack of complete characterization. Passing reference is made to most things I value or respect, if only in my compulsive and redundant lists.

The pages pass below my pen... already this new notebook is gaining its own distinct character, its own heaviness as I hold it... its sacred feeling grows. Each ink mark adds to the significance and irreplaceability of this journal. I have to remind myself how far along we have come, together, my journal and I, and we go on.

What satisfaction this ritual gives me... Indeed, now I am following my bliss. To what consequence, I have no idea. Is writing my bliss, after all? Is this the art I must perfect to every degree of sacrifice and self-discipline, that will be my reason to live, my purpose for learning and exploring and loving and suffering? May I gain more than this frenzied satisfaction, and touch the souls of others who will read my word images and be joyous or sorrowful at my bidding?

It's 2:20 a.m. and unfortunately I am in the world in which that time makes sense. It makes me regretful to recall the prescription for a good day at work; I don't want to wake to an alarm and stumble out of bed to throw on clothes. I'd rather follow my dreams where they will take me until I can't physically sleep anymore, then get up and

make the bed and plump the pillows and turn on the music and begin my day with sweet melodies instead of the blaring, invasive bleats of that red-eyed digital box.

I wish I could write all night long, stain my hands with red and blue and purple and black ink and stop only to wring the cramps out of my right hand before bending back to my task of following my hand and the pen with my mind. When I get into a groove like this I cannot take responsibility for the pen's magic with anything as slow and ponderous as my conscious thought. The pen is what seems nimble and unstoppable at times like these, and it is like a rare and expensive intoxicant.

My muse is perched across from me, hand on chin; legs crossed; watching me, bemused by my reluctance to take action-- to either write and write and write instead of writing about writing, or to close the notebook and be responsible and effectively turn my back on Inspiration. And so the result is that I'm caught in the middle, not going all the way with either option. My muse shakes her head (his head?) and draws away so that I don't even know what vein I was supposed to tap if I did want to throw early morning obligations to the wind to create an essay or a poem or a story on these embracing white pages... plenty of them available, lying in wait for me to mark them with my pen, the instrument of my crude or elegant ideas. And if I were to fill these pages, another identical notebook rests alertly in my filing cabinet, its pages also ready to prostitute their clear virgin purity before me for whatever I choose to inflict upon them-- endless lists or cartoons or lamentations or celebrations or confessions or truths-- truths that are my most enormous lies, lies that are the most profound truths-- my journal takes it all cheerfully, blandly, openly-- maybe not carefully but with completely untainted, unregulated readiness. I don't know if the paper really conveys the emotion or bias of cheerfulness, but I'll take that impression and go with it, with a wry grin.

I'm getting tired. I feel wrung out... whether from the late hour after a long day, the effort in following my pen as it scrawled down things that it wanted to, the dilemma between wanting to follow my pen to the ends of the earth, and needing to sleep because of my long day tomorrow-- or because of the vulnerability of writing, even in my unjudging journal. In any case, I will try to defer to the physical obligation and its attending rationales, and bid my journal goodnight. This must support and build my life, not become so intrusive and demanding that I get no sleep.

But I MUST write to live... and when it is charged and driven I must pay heed because there is much to be said and much to learn from such experiences. This feeling is what justifies my art, if I may be so bold and brazen to call it that. I love being physically affected by writing. The journal builds up my energy, wringing the words out of me as I want to be wrung out for something valuable, essential, powerful, readable... When I sit down with pen in hand, or place my fingers on the keyboard, I have a delicious sense of self-indulgence, the lightness of a mind set free by words.

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