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### The Writer's Life

A famous writer once said that as a writer, you get to live your life twice. That's the good news. The bad news is--you guessed it--you get to live your life twice.

I have recently come to the writer's life with a whole host of memories that have been unexplored for the last 40 years. That's a lot of life to live over. How much time do I have to write? Not enough. It's hard enough to keep up with my current life, let alone catch up on the last 40 years.

Still, I consider myself lucky. Here I am, typing on my laptop at 2am (Mountain time, that is. Consider me a late night owl if you live in the Pacific time zone and if you are in the Eastern time zone, just think of me as an early morning person). All I need to do is to write about what I know. I just filled out a profile of myself for a sorority alumnae newsletter. The editor didn't know what she was getting into when she sent me the list of questions to answer. I'm 20 years older, with a well-honed smart alecky voice that's been informed by the cynicism of being in the corporate world too long, the exposure to bodily fluids and other necessities of raising children, and the no-nonsense bluntness of being a consultant and business coach. I can do a lot with a question like, "What are your favorite hobbies?"

Here's what I love about the writer's life. You *do* live your life twice. Writing about my favorite memories of living in a sorority house took me right back to the cat fights, the burnt popcorn, and Roberts Rules of Order for our weekly meetings. And those were just my favorite memories. I had forgotten those vivid sights, smells, and feelings that were so much a part of my college experience. I had forgotten where I've been and what all has been on the journey. As an organization development consultant (yes, you can be a writer and do other cool stuff as well), I realized that my first in-depth look at organizations was from being a part of a sorority, living next to the president of the house and seeing her struggle with calculus but run meetings of 60 young women with ease. I had forgotten how excited I was when my husband picked me up at the house for a date and how he looked when he still had a lot of hair. I had forgotten the sweet feeling of singing with other women that you feel close to.

So here's what I hate about the writer's life. You *do* live your life twice. I've had my share of disappointments, fears, and anxious moments. I remember living in fear as a child when my father would lose his temper. I remember the embarrassment of not making the tennis team in high school and having to retreat to playing in the jazz band. I remember the disappointment of having my fiancée tell me he couldn't visit me when I was 200 miles away, working a summer job in a strange city. I remember the anxiety of living in that same city, in an old apartment building and finding out that my kitchen was infested with cockroaches. To relive those times may be cathartic but sometimes it's more than the heart can bear. Maybe that's why so many writers are neurotic. You would be too if you had to live through the bad stuff twice.

What I know to be true about the writer's life is what I know to be true about life. The more you notice, the more alive you are to what life has to offer. And if that means digging up the good and the bad memories from childhood, college, first jobs, jobs I hated, jobs I loved, people I hated, people I loved, long marriages and short interludes, babies and boys and washing machines that break down, well, so much the better.

There's an idea in life coaching around "flat lining". The idea is that clients don't want to live their life in a small range of emotion, like a flat line on a heart monitor. They want the full range, the peaks and the valleys. This is what the coach helps with, drawing out the highs and lows so that clients experience all of their life, not just the parts that made it through the Censor. So it is with writing. My goal is to experience all of my life in writing, not just the parts that I want to write about, the nice parts. Quite frankly, the nice parts make for boring reading. Just like I don't want to be seen as nice as a consultant or a coach, I wouldn't want that descriptor as a writer. I'd rather be interesting and provocative. To provoke is to engage. To engage is to live.

I was interviewing a writing coach recently as part of my exploration into the writer's life. The woman asked me what my goal was in focusing on writing. I told her that I wanted to get my writing seen by more people. But that my need to have impact on the world was neck and neck with my own selfish desire to be more and more "in the flow". And then the words popped out of my mouth, "I want to have a better life. That's why I write."

What life do you want to step into? How will that make for a better life? Think about it and don't let the Censor keep you from the really juicy parts.

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