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Staring at the New Year: Reflections on Writing

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, January 3rd, 2018

Around this time, I find myself listless. It's New Year and I'm paralyzed by anxiety about writing: how to start it; where to fit it in my busy schedule where I juggle the responsibilities of father, husband, and teacher; how to deal with rejections and what seems to be "cold silence" from the world; and why it is still meaningful, important, and fun.



Raymond Carver at his writing desk, photo taken by Bob Adelman

Below is a list of my thoughts on writing to remind myself of why I do what I do, and if you find it helpful, use it and share it with others. If you have other writing suggestions, feel free to contribute below.

1. Find a comfortable place, sit down, and read. You write what you read.
2. Write out of love, not hate, for the subject of your obsession. Your readers will be pulled in by the respect you show for your subject matter. They will understand why it matters to you.
3. Be attentive to dreams, especially those recurring ones; be attentive to when and why your heart stops and starts beating; be attentive to the shape & sound, the rhythm & memory of each word. Be attentive.
4. Take a small notebook and pen (or pencil) with you on your solitary strolls, which clear the mind of clutter and bring you closer to the heart of the matter.
5. As with love, don't force it. Writing should be as natural as breathing in air, screaming in pain when your hand touches hot stove, or fluttering of the heart when the woman you love smiles at you. Seriously, don't rush. Take your sweet time; let the ideas and the words simmer to perfection.
6. If you are the type who writes regularly, do it. If you are the type who lets your subconscious mind do its magic, then trust it. Do your daily chores, feed your children, punch the time clock, grocery shop, make love, and sleep. When it's ready, have fun since you will have no control over it anyway.
7. When in a rut, turn off the computer and play with your kids and your wife will like you better for it. What's that saying? Happy wife, happy life.
8. Don't forget to be grateful for the gift of each word, memory, and breath. You are lucky to be alive. And it's a privilege to be able to express yourself.
9. Getting rejections is part of a writer's life; things will go better if you learn to accept this (easier said than done).
10. Please don't pay attention to book lists created by this critic or that organization. Those are about the people you know, networking, a popularity contest. You were never popular in high school, so why do you think it's any different now? Instead, focus on the words in front of you; they are all that matters.
11. As Morrissey once sang, "Hold on to your friends!" Your friends know when you are not being true and will tell you so; share your work with them.
12. This leads me to the following: thank those who have supported you along the way. You are not an island.
13. Support other writers, especially those starting out. There is no other way but to be generous with each other. Buy their books; write reviews. If you don't have money, help spread the good news of their publications on Facebook and other social media.
14. If you are a teacher, teach the books you love. It makes the job easier and everyone will have fun (if not, then you will have fun, and that is really important).
15. Don't drink and write—well, except coffee and tea (for me, anyway).

If you have read this far, take it easy. It's not a matter of life and death. Be serious, committed, and disciplined to the craft, but also be kind to yourself, wife, and family.

(Featured photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher.)

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