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When Writing Feels Right

Today the bulk, brunt, and brute force of my written words are absorbed by the keys of a thirteen-inch MacBook Pro. Once in a while they are welcomed in great long rushes that start at the top of my head and race through my arms onto the screen, but most of the writing I do when I sit down to *write* feels like it comes in a rhythm of one step forward, two steps back that somehow still staggers across a page. The path of my cursor is never linear: surging forward, careening back to catch a forgotten comma, jumping from the end of a sentence to its beginning to add, erase, or rephrase. I consider myself a writer not because writing is an easy exercise for me, but because I like the process and feeling of wordsmithing an exceptional sentence enough to endure the blood, sweat, and tears shed while hunched over my Silicon Valley-made anvil.

Writing has not always required such mental and physical effort from me. When I was a little girl I wrote freely and without laboring over my words or ideas. Tucked away in a file cabinet at home is a manila folder stuffed with first manuscripts, some are written by hand, others pecked out on the word processor my Mom had in college; but if the words in these stories are carefully chosen it is by joyful selection, not the exhaustive audition process I now employ. And yet, within this body of early work there is no particular story or piece through which I “became” a writer. Because truly I cannot remember a time before I knew that writing is something I do.

I come from a legacy of English majors. My Granddad studied English as an undergraduate before continuing his education in Law, my Uncle was a high school English teacher, and both of my parents hold bachelor's degrees in English. None of the four of them went on to *be* writers, and yet, the value of indentifying and producing good writing has been impressed on me since I was very young. My parents did not push me to write or even to read, but they did give me every opportunity to fall in love with the English language. They read aloud to me, we made up stories together, and wrote them down together. The library was as familiar to me as my living room, and when I learned to write on my own, journals were provided and subsequently filled with unsteady script. I often wrote notes or poems or stories to give as gifts, in part because gifts of this variety elicited such delight from recipients in my family. In third grade my best friend Lizzie and I co-authored a book about a princess and her unicorn (it remains untitled today) and I learned that writing is as inherently collaborative as it is solitary. In fifth grade my teacher, Ms. Christiane, began reading my compositions aloud to the class as examples of excellent work and it dawned on me that people outside of my family also saw value in my writing. In seventh grade I laboriously typed the winning speech in a speech contest at school, recited it in a Friday morning assembly, and gained public recognition as a writer. These and numerous other positive writing experiences throughout middle school and high school never provided that single crystalline moment of clarity "I am a writer", but rather a comforting reassurance that writing, which—whether by nature or nurture—I already gravitated toward, was something I could do, and probably do well.

I like the control in writing, I like that I can choose my words carefully, that I can test their full effect before I release them into the world. And I am drawn—almost as a fault—to beautiful turns of phrase, to the sparkling adverbs and adjectives that illuminate a composition.

This fascination with elegant writing, begun in my parent's laps, continues today in my pursuit of an English degree. I admire the great precision and control with which many of the authors I read handle their words, and acknowledge that my relative comfort in the role of a writer can never surpass carefully honed skill. Here in a University setting the stakes of writing have been raised, the arena in which I perform continually widened; but the eventual aim of communicating something clearly, beautifully, and intelligently remains the same. I am the writer I am today not because I have been pushed to it, not because I have personal narratives or the plots of novels straining to escape through the sutures in my skull. Not merely because I have been told I am a strong writer, but because it is a comfortable mode of expression for me. As if writing is the kind of thinking my mind is built to do. It is the pleasure I take in honing a sentence to near-perfection that sees me staring into the artificial white light of a Word document with such regularity. I am a writer because for me it has always felt right to, well, write.