



## **on being a writer**

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I'm a writer. One who writes. Yet, it's more than that. More than what I do. More than a hobby, an occupation. It's a way of life. One doesn't become a writer simply through the *act* of writing or the good fortune of publication. One is born a writer.

I'm a writer. That's *who* I'm.

I've been writing all my life. When I was a little girl, I had a bookstand. While all of the other neighborhood kids were selling lemonade in Dixie cups, I sold my stories—illustrated and stapled together, like books, for 25 cents each. As a teenager, I wrote everything down. Every confusing emotion, every hormone-driven rant, every seemingly precocious piece of insight was recorded into journals, transformed into poetry, embellished for dramatic effect, and worked into short stories.

Being a writer was so much easier when I was younger. I wrote because I loved to, was compelled to. I didn't think about it too much, self-consciously editing my work, myself. I wrote what came naturally to me, without regard for an audience. I didn't have to worry about how to market, sell, or turn a profit. As a kid, I knew I wanted to be a writer when I grew up, but I wasn't troubled about how that might happen. I scoured the 'About the Author' section at the backs of the books I read, and it seemed to me that all authors were also teachers or college professors, living in east coast towns of which I'd never heard. With their cats. I already had a cat; so, as far as I was concerned, I was halfway there. The next step, clearly, was to become a teacher; then, I'd be on my way. I didn't know, in those days, about agents and publishers. I hadn't yet learned of the distinction between writers, those who write, and successful writers—the ones who make a *living* by writing.

I would, however, learn quickly. As I entered adulthood, the realities of rent, bills, savings accounts and retirement plans began to burden me. And I was faced with the dilemma with which, eventually, all artists must grapple: How do I support myself financially while doing what I love? I realized I had to find a way to blend art with business, and transform what was once an almost primal passion into a money-maker.

I grew up and, suddenly, I was no longer a writer. Instead, I was a production assistant who wanted to *be* a writer; a casting assistant who liked to write *on the side*; a teacher who *used to* write. I didn't have the time to write; I was too busy trying to be a success.

Then, my father died.

I remember watching his coffin being lowered into the ground and thinking of how young he was. He was fifty years old. Too young to die. I don't know why it often takes death to make us really examine our lives; but, after the funeral, I thought about the way I was living *my* life and considered what it would take to make me truly happy, before it was too late. I didn't have to think about it long. I decided, two days after I buried my father, that I wouldn't waste any more time doing something I didn't love. I began, two days after I buried my father, to research MFA programs in creative writing.

I still don't know how to be a successful writer—one who makes a living by writing. But I'm hoping that dedicating the next three years of my life to the craft may help. I think that acknowledging that writing is such an integral part of my identity—that it deserves a new commitment of time and energy—is a start. I feel the most important step is claiming it for myself...labeling I'm a writer, who has also worked as a production assistant, casting assistant, and teacher.

I'm a writer. One who writes.

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