

# Scribbler

*A newsletter for writers dedicated to writing from the core and keeping the pen moving.*

## Why I Write

by

Ralph Dranow, Editor



**F**or many years I was in love with the fantasy of being a writer. With minimal mental overhead, I was Thomas Wolfe one day, D.H. Lawrence the next. My forays into creativity were sporadic, resulting in a story published in my high school literary magazine and some silly, overwritten sports articles for the Queens College newspaper that the editor usually reshaped into something I barely recognized. My fragile ego rebelled, and I quit the newspaper after a couple of months.

I got serious about writing when I was thirty and newly living in Berkeley. Plagued by self-doubts, I persevered, developing the discipline of writing every day and of finishing projects I started. Writing groups; classes and workshops; free-lance editors; and a supportive wife, who also wrote, were all helpful. In the next twenty years, I wrote a novel, self-published a book of stories, and churned out numerous other stories.

But I wasn't happy. I drove myself like a machine, often writing many hours each day, feeling guilty when I took a day off. When a therapist said to me that the main purpose of writing was enjoyment, I thought she was naive. I reflected upon all the stories I'd had rejected by magazines. How could I enjoy writing if I hadn't gotten my novel published, placed my stories with prestigious literary magazines, sold thousands of copies of my book? Angry and frustrated, I wondered why the world was so reluctant to recognize my talent.

Then my marriage ended; my narrow world cracked open. I couldn't help realizing the emotional prison I'd locked myself into. The pain I felt during those early post-marriage months eroded my defenses, allowing me to write my first poems. I'd always wanted to write poetry, and the amazing fact that I was actually doing it filled me with joy. I loved poetry's elegant shorthand, enabling me to dive into the maelstrom of my feelings, emerging with battered treasures. I dabbed truth on raw wounds, feeling my skin tingle and burn.

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*Why I Write* (continued from page 1)

Writing poetry felt like speaking a new language, like flying with homemade wings, like dancing across the English Channel. And my poems, crude as they were at first, were getting published. My perspective had changed, though. Getting published was gratifying, but it wasn't the main reason I wrote. I wrote because it was like breathing, like a hot bowl of soup on a winter night; it nourished me, kept me alive. How empty my life would have been without that faithful companion who knew my own thoughts and feelings better than I did myself!

I took some poetry workshops, which helped me speak this new language more fluently, to walk the tightrope of an image. I realized I'd played it too safe with my prose. And I started learning how to enjoy sharing poetry with other writers, to acknowledge the talents of my compatriots without envy or competitiveness. I felt the comfort of being among my own kind, of communing with those strange, solitary creatures who spend long hours ruminating, grazing the pastures of their own minds. We were natural allies, I came to realize, fellow tap dancers of language, coal miners of the truth. Friends, tai chi, Buddhist meditation, volunteer work, all made my life feel fuller, more balanced, helping me to see writing as a way to get beyond myself, to escape the prison of the ego.

So, besides digging in the basement of my own psyche, I want my writing to flow outward, seeping into the skins of plants, animals, people, paintings, photographs. I want to express gratitude for orange sunlight oozing through the trees at twilight and for the sinuous ripple of the cat's body as she crosses the street. I also want to capture the forlorn expression of the homeless woman who trudges the streets of Oakland like a dazed soldier.

I see writing as a way of reclaiming the past, letting ghosts out of the closet. Writing is reconciliation, enabling me to find my way home to my deceased mother and grandfather, whom I'd been alienated from when they were alive. Writing is prayer, an attempt to heal a broken world. Writing is also dancing and drinking, staying up all night to witness the sun yawn as it slides out of bed. Writing is the blind date, the fawn ambling on someone's front lawn, the knock on the door that startles you to attention.

It's an exciting journey, which I feel as if I've just begun. I look forward to sharing writing journeys with you, fellow travelers, to sharing vulnerability and wonder, sadness and laughter, outrage and joy, all the diverse but convergent reasons why we write.

*Postscript-2016 Today I would add that writing is heart-to-heart connection, and most of all, love.*

**Prayer #2**

by Rampujan 2/18/93

Hooting owl, hover over me,  
show your white breast as you rest  
on the wind.  
Mysterious one, protect me  
as I grope.



Black serpent, guardian of the  
dark depths, keeper of caves and mines,  
o let us pass  
when our lonely journey  
takes us here.

Great turtle, keep me safe as I  
sort and count and piece things together  
on this hard rock—all of us  
who are compelled to  
seek our higher selves—  
bless us and keep us from harm.

Oh small bird who sings  
as the sun melts the morning frost,  
keep singing, keep singing,  
through us, around us,  
sometimes in spite of us,  
let the song come through.