



HMS Press Publishing BookClub BookLits 2019

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Creative Writing Prose & 21 Pelicans Poetry

One of the first and usually the easiest to put down on paper is a diary and/or a personal journal. A diary is primarily a personal accounting of yourself to yourself. Journaling is an expanded set of entries that are not necessarily daily or personal. If an unrelated idea comes to you in your journal, feel free to expand the idea. Don't look at the pen, just start writing. Let it take you outside the box, or at least, your apartment box. When you go on trips or vacations, or meet interesting people etc., Journaling is the best memory maker. Journaling is a good first step toward taking those ideas and expanding them into a poem or a story, or essay, or even a novel.

Once you've stepped up and taken the leap into prose or longer letters etc., a second writing tip comes into play; write first, edit later. Editing while you write can be the frustrating part if you struggle with spelling or words in general. It can hold you back and may take away from the original idea or a creative moment you had. Write first, edit later.

After you put down in words what you want to form into a story, a few things emerge to help make it better and easier. Don't forget, you are not writing for yourself now, you are writing to be read and/or heard by others. Does everyone walk around all day with their eyes closed or their head down or their mouth closed? Wait. That's Cell Phone use in modern society! No, so add clear descriptions and settings and don't forget to use dialogue when necessary. Don't forget about accents where needed.

If you have trouble with description and settings, then you should use a technique developed by Ted Plantos, Toronto's Parliament St. Librarian in the 90's. It's a technique he called storying.

"The example I will use is from a story I called Mrs. Wilmot. I begin with the image of her driving in a car on a dark road. It is raining. There may be any number of reasons she may be in this situation. The story develops by introducing another element. There is a package beside her on the seat. There can be any number of related things to expand the story; like someone in the headlights, a ring on her finger, a radio announcement. What kind of car, what color, a dirt road, a paved road, urban, country setting etc.? Each of these added elements would give the story a particular direction. The next element that occurred to me was that she was delivering a package. To do this on a dark rainy night it must be for a friend. Was it a dirt road, paved, wooded fields, lakeshore etc. speed she was going, automatic, standard? The idea is for the different elements added to suggest a story that eventually takes off.

Ok, let's look at an innocent character named Josh. Josh gets on an empty elevator. On the next floor, somebody gets on the elevator; a woman with a small dog, a woman in a bikini, a man in dark glasses or in a cowboy hat, someone whom he has never seen before but knows his name or a man clutching a brief case to his chest. We then ask who these people are and how they may affect Josh. Any number of situations can be built around any number of characters.

The idea is to layer characters, settings and situations until the story takes off. In storying it would also help if the author would create a biographical, psychological and

physical sketches of the characters. Much of the things you think about a worked out as the characters are developed and they determine where the story is going. The idea of storying is to reach a point where you are not consciously layering, but the story takes off and has a life of it's own. It all flows out of the original one or two sentence setting and the meeting of characters.”

At around the same time period that Ted placed his story, Grace Colella had a similar idea in her essay on *Becoming A Writer* about storying the characters:

“You know how vividly you see a strange town or strange country when you first enter it. The huge red buses careening through London, on the wrong side of the road to every American that ever saw them - soon they are as easy to dodge and ignore as the green buses of New York, and as little wonderful as the drugstore window that you pass on your way to work each day. The drugstore window, though, the streetcar that carries you to work, the crowded subway, can look as strange as Xanadu if you refuse to take them for granted. As get into your streetcar, or walk along a street, tell yourself that for fifteen minutes you will notice and tell yourself about every single thing that your eyes rest on. The streetcar: what color is it outside? Not just red or green here, but sage or olive green, scarlet, or maroon. Where is the entrance? Has it a conductor or a motorman, or both in one? What colors are on the inside? What colors on the walls, the floor, the seats, the advertising posters? How do the seats face? Who is sitting opposite you? How are your neighbors dressed, how do they stand or sit? What are they reading, or are they sound asleep? What sounds are you hearing? What smells are reaching you? How does the strap feel under your hand, or the stuff of the coat that brushes past you? After a few moments you can drop your intense awareness, but plan to resume it again when the scene changes.

Another time speculate on the person opposite you. Where did she come from, and where is she going? What can you guess about her from her face, her attitude, her clothes? What, do you imagine was her home life like? [see Virginia Woolf's story *An Unwritten Novel* from her book *Monday or Tuesday*]"

Hint number four; If you notice what you watch in movies or on TV, something should occur in your stories. Never introduce something if you are not going to use it later on. Let's say you are writing a mystery or a play and one of the characters has a cat. Big deal right! But if an intruder is in a later scene or chapter, breaking into the house in the night, trips over the cat sleeping on the stairs and falls to his death or breaks a leg and is caught, then cause and effect are complete. Now keep a closer eye on those movies and watch for this. You may be surprised at how prevalent it is.

Colella, in her essay on *Becoming A Writer*, gives us thought on characterization, using ourselves:

“Now we come to the first exercise of a book which will be full of exercises. Its purpose is to show you how simple it is to see oneself objectively. You are near a door. When you come to the end put the book aside, get up and go through that door. From the moment you stand on the threshold turn yourself into your own object of attention. What do you look like, standing there? How do you walk? What, if you knew anything about yourself, could be gathered of you, your character, your background, your purpose just in being there at just that minute, that moment? If there are people in the room whom you

must greet, how do you greet them? How do your attitudes to them vary? Do you give any overt sign that you are fonder of one, or more aware of one, than the rest? There is no deep, dark, esoteric purpose behind this exercise. It is a primer lesson in considering oneself objectively, and should be dismissed from your mind when you have learned what you can from it.

Another time try sitting at ease and - using no gestures at all - tell yourself step by step how to comb your hair. You will find it harder than you think. Again, follow yourself at any small routine task. A little later take an episode of the day before. See yourself going up to it and coming away from it; and the episode itself as it might look to a stranger. At still another time, think how you might have looked if you could follow yourself all day long from a little height. Use the fiction maker's eye on yourself [writers' license] to see how you would have appeared when you went in and out of houses, up streets and into stores, and back home at the end of the day.

Your story's scenes are going to be the specific stages by which your main character's motivations are enacted against opposition, internal or external or both. A motivation against no opposition is boring. How somebody always got everything they wanted, succeeded in every task, won every suitor in sight, and never met a comeuppance, wouldn't have any drama. A chronicle of Don Juan's amorous exploits would be dull without the avenging paternal statue to send the Don gibbering off to a well deserved damnation . . . Writing calls on unused muscles and involves solitude and immobility. There is not much to be said for the recommendation, so often heard, to serve an apprenticeship to journalism if you intend to write fiction. But a journalist's career does teach two lessons which every writer needs to learn - that it is possible to write for long periods without fatigue, and that if one pushes on past the first weariness one finds a reservoir of unsuspected energy - one reaches the famous "second wind." But it is possible to make either typing or writing by hand second nature, so that muscular strain will not slow you down or keep you from writing."

Colella goes on to help the beginning writer by stating:

"Writing calls on unused muscles and involves solitude and immobility. There is not much to be said for the recommendation, so often heard, to serve an apprenticeship to journalism if you intend to write fiction. But a journalist's career does teach two lessons which every writer needs to learn - that it is possible to write for long periods without fatigue, and that if one pushes on past the first weariness one finds a reservoir of unsuspected energy - one reaches the famous "second wind". But it is possible to make either typing or writing by hand second nature, so that muscular strain will not slow you down or keep you from writing.

So if you have are to have the full benefit of the richness of the unconscious you must learn to write easily and smoothly when the unconscious is in the ascendent. The best way to do this is to rise half an hour, or a full hour earlier than you customarily rise. Just as soon as you can and without talking, without reading the morning paper, without picking up the book you laid aside the night before - begin to write. Write anything that comes into your head: last night's dream; the activities of the day before; a conversation, real or imaginary; an examination of conscience. Write any sort of early morning reverie, rapidly and uncritically. The excellence or ultimate worth of what you write is of no or little importance yet. As a matter of fact, you will find more value in this material than

you expect, but your primary purpose now is not to bring forth words, but to write any words at all which are not pure nonsense.

To reiterate, what you are actually doing is training yourself, simply to write. It makes no difference to the success of this practice if your paragraphs are amorphous, the thought vague or extravagant, the ideas hazy. Forget that you have any critical faculty at all; realize that no one need ever see what you are writing unless you chose to show it. You may, if you can, write in a notebook, sitting up in bed. If you can teach yourself to type in this period, so much the better. Write as long as you have free time, or until you feel that you have utterly written yourself out. The next morning begin without rereading what you have already done. Remember: you are to write before you have read at all. The purpose of this injunction will become clear later. Now all you need to concern yourself with, is the mere performance of the exercise. After a day or two you will find that there is a certain number of words that you can write easily and without strain. When you have found that limit, begin to push it ahead by a few sentences, then by a paragraph or two. A little later, try to double it before you stop the morning's work.

Within a short time you will find that the exercise has begun to bear fruit. The actual labor of writing no longer seems arduous or dull. You will have begun to feel that you can get as much (far more really) from a written reverie as from one that goes on almost wordlessly in the back of your mind. When you wake, reach out for your pencil, and begin to write almost on impulse, you will be ready for the next step. Keep the material you have written under lock and key if that is the only way to save yourself from self-consciousness. It will have uses you can hardly foresee. You should be able to write more words now than when you began. Watch yourself carefully; if at anytime you find you have slipped back into inactive reverie, whenever you are in danger of the spiritual doubt that comes to the most facile writer from time to time, put the pencil and paper back on your bedside table and wake to write in the morning."

Colella's style is different than that of Plantos as his is a build off of each word or sentence to build an idea, Colella says to just write it all down. She continues:

"At once, when you have put the suggestion in the last chapter into operation, you will find that you are truly more of a writer than when you ever were before. You will discover that now you have a tendency to cast the day's experiences into words, to foresee the use that you will make of an anecdote or episode that has come your way, to transform the rough material of life into fictional shape, more consistently than you did when writing was a sporadic, capricious occupation which broke out from time to time unaccountably, or was undertaken only when you felt that you had a story firmly within your grasp. The moment you reach that stage, you are ready for the next step, which is to teach yourself to write at a given moment.

After you have dressed, sit down for a moment by yourself and go over the day ahead of you. Usually you can tell accurately enough what its demands and opportunities will be; roughly at least, you can sketch out for yourself enough of your program to know when you will have a few moments to yourself. It need not be a very long time; fifteen minutes will do nicely, and there is almost no wage slave so driven that he cannot snatch a quarter of an hour from a busy day if he is in earnest about it. Decide for yourself when you will take that time for writing; for you are going to write in it. If your work falls off, let us say, after three-thirty in the afternoon, the fifteen minutes from four o'clock until a

quarter past four can safely be drafted as time of your own. Well then, at four o'clock you are going to write, come what may, and you are going to continue until the quarter-hour sounds. When you have made up your mind to do what you are free to do whatever you like to do or must do.

Now this is very important, and can hardly be emphasized too strongly: you have decided to write at four o'clock, and at four o'clock write you must! No excuses can be given. If at four o'clock you find yourself deep in conversation, you must excuse yourself and keep your engagement. Your agreement is a debt of honor, and must be scrupulously discharged. You have given yourself your word and there is no retracting it. If you must climb out over the heads of your friends at that hour, then be ruthless: another time you will find that you have taken some pains not to be caught in a dilemma of the sort. If to get the solitude that is necessary you must go into the washroom, go there, lean against the wall, and write. Write as you write in the mornings - anything at all. Write sense or non-sense, limericks or blank verse; write what you think of your employer or your secretary or your teacher. Write a short synopsis or a fragment of dialogue, or a description of someone you have recently noticed. However halting or perfunctory the writing is, write. If you must, you can write, "I am finding this exercise remarkably difficult," and say what you think are the reasons for the difficulty. Vary the complaint from day to day till it no longer represents the true state of affairs." Grace Colella's essay is titled *Dorothea Brande's Becoming a Writer*.

Finally, know where you are going with a story. What was the theme or purpose when you had started? Did it change or stay the same? A twist ending is usually good to grab the reader. Say something no one else has said before. The same applies for poetry. Write something that's gonna reach out and grab ya!

21 Pelicans

Now an application, a serendipity. While reading novels over a period of time I would sometimes scan down the edge of a page and see the outline of a poem peeking between the lines. This small idea came to fruition when a group of guys was discussing a fantasy sports team based on the Florida sports team by the same name. It became 21 Pelicans because there were 21 guys using the fantasy sport club. I saw a series of Found Poems taken from page 21 of any book of fiction created from the first 3-4 words of each line going down the page on the inside or the last 3-4 words going down the outside of the page text. The use of Writer's License is encouraged for flow or if non consecutive lines cannot be used. This style would fit into the category of Creative Plagiarism as previously published in the 9 Chapbook series: CPA BookClub Booklits 1996. Place the position of the new poem (first/last) next to the original book title & p.21. If you chose a different page number, be consistent with each book you choose, e.g.: 75 Pelicans, 200 Pelicans etc. Author credit is optional as it's your Found Poem, they wrote the book not the poem.

Sample short poem or Haiku:

Angela's Ashes p.21, first.

Apartment is empty.
In the icebox, cabbage rot,
white enamel mug.

The Waves p.21, last

Everybody knows
for the first time, first time,
I must not cry.

Brave New World p.21, first.

The Nile is the length of
all rivers, do you know
of the head of the Nile?
The Nile is the length of
rushing out.
Well now! Eyes are blank.
But the Nile? That howl!
No further attempt made unless
you know what it is all about.
Whereas, if they'd led the way,
moral education followed him
in any circumstances. Silence!

The Marrow Thieves p. 21, last.

I came from now
with a gray sludge
like a myth, longest
hair of untrimmed edges.
Out of the way, I remember
burnt from original tones
without words between
wide shoulders, dotted,
shared one head, belly
of the East coast.
Practically a woman, old enough,
still a child,
sweat lodge of broken branches.

Pelican Brief p.21, first.

In the guarded whispers
often heard and languages
found, try to remember
amazing feats of terror, the
ambush of seventeen;
suspects, car bombs, mastermind
attacks and assassination.
Targets are unknown.
Attack is certain.
"Yes", a nervous woman asked.

Angela's Ashes p. 21, last.

My father is out
but there is nothing
in the melted ice
floating in water on
my parent's bed.
Black tea I tell you,
when I was a boy.
One day, Oh! Big Dog!
The Hound of Ulster.
This is my story,
Dad can't tell.

Mrs. Dalloway p. 21, last.

The sentence was finished,
something so trifling
yet in its fullness,
rather emotional.
Thoughts of the dead
which led to words.
ears of girls with
pure white surface agitation.
Something very profound.

Sigma Protocol p. 21, last.

An anachronism in this
digitally enhanced way,
long burnished Mahogany,
head of table, look around.
Only days remain
before your patience,
beyond your wildest dreams, gratifying.
One small problem.
Blood roared in his stomach,
What kind of mind snaps
a decade of half twisted memory?
Something brackish and metallic.
Murder!

**The High Mountains Of Portugal
p.21, first.**

A bewildered stare,
sure enough a few steps
reach the streetlight.
Cannot hear but we can watch,
smiles, nods, gratitude.
The stranger swiveling around,
"Ah, but wait!"
Glance back, surprised.
Careful it's rude to stare,
turns his head again,
it's too late, he hits it,
a bell.

The Whisper Man p.21, first.

When I was finally
standing at the far end,
something on the floor,
better on the stairs.
Everything was black,
dirt with smears,
bare floor board,
possessions like trash
always growing darker.
It felt like home.

Trust Me, I'm Lying p.21, last

Like nuts in brownies,
into the nearest building,
stop me before I get far.
Decent cup of espresso?
Like a well trained puppy
he loves his voice,
looks hither and yon,
all but whispers.
My brain, gauging the mark,
I'd like a little more information.
Focus!
Yes!