

WHY DO I WRITE?

It's not like I'm writing a poem every day. Far from it. But when I do, when some image or idea has so stuck itself in my head that I have to keep turning it over and over, attacking it from as many angles I deem possible, when I'm in those writing jags and the work is coming fast and fully formed after months of contemplation, when I'm in "that zone" as my first writing mentor used to say, I feel more present and grounded than at other moments in my daily life, as if the true self, call it mind, call it voice, is suddenly struck in high relief (or is suddenly striking a pose) by this concentrated act of pulling and placing words together.

And though I do not write poems every day I remain engaged with the process every day whether that means testing out sentence rhythms in the million and one emails I feel get composed, or the notes I jot down on the backs of my bookmarks when a snippet of overheard conversation seems to resonate or an image I have witnessed burns itself into my retina, or even the reading I do on the subway on my way to and from my day job to see how others go about the dance.

So even though I do not write in that concentrated way every day, if I had to pinpoint what it was about writing that keeps me doing it I'd have to say the process. Don't get me wrong, I love the end product when the formal choices of word-music and rhythm and imagery all click together, but I love living in the process for as long as I can. The white page never terrifies me as I always work from notes. As long as I have those raw materials, a handful of words, I can spin in any direction, rhyming and chiming, arranging their placement like the seating chart for a dinner party to see which order is the best order, which cadence conveys the meaning best, all the pleasures of crafting a form that captures the actual process and takes the reader along on all the twists and turns of thought, the choices made along the way.

For ultimately that is why I write: to create snapshots of the brain in motion, to document the process of thinking, thinking about feeling, about the emotional states in which one finds him or herself, making sense of the experiences we have with each other, with the world at large, and that ongoing conversation with the self that on some level is in constant marvel at being a sentient being, of having consciousness and conscience. And doing this all within the constraints of form, setting down our individual way of seeing in a construct that will last, that will allow another to step behind your eyes in that ultimate empathic act. This is why I write.

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Originally published in the "Why Do I Write" series edited by Dustin Brookshire at his blog [I Was Born Doing Reference Work in Sin](#).