

Writer's Retreat for Beginners

I think I was ten when I first dreamed of being a writer. Of course, my dream was enhanced by my pre-adolescent imagination and had little to nothing to do with the realities of life. I never paid heed to how as a writer I might put a roof over my head and feed myself, let alone feed a family. I imagined sitting in a scented walled English garden pouring out my heart into notebooks while dangling my toes in a rushing stream. It was an image I carried with me for years. By the time my grown-up self actually lived in England, I had long lost touch with the dream of my ten-year-old self. Yet to be honest, during my months in England, as I bobbed in and out of the depths of depression, it was writing that saved me. Because through my writing I could connect with a part of myself that had disappeared from all other realms of my life.

I never actually became a writer. I've just always written. When thoughts swirl in my mind, I'm compelled to put pen to paper and release what is there. Sometimes it may be just a string of lists or a few disjointed phrases, but this action can feel as important as my next breath. There are times I do worry that should I pass from this world unexpectedly, someone will try to make sense of my collection of scattered notebooks, making me out to be crazier than I deserve.

To remedy that, my truly crazy thoughts are saved for large sheets of white paper decorated with sticky notes and ideas in colored ink – and I'm sure I've hidden these quite well.

The Watergate hearings began with a rumble during my middle school years and I became enamored with the form of investigative journalism born in that era. I put all of my heart and soul into the editorial role I had for my school newspaper and looked for opportunities to expose injustice in the halls of my small town middle school.

In high school, I continued my passionate pursuit of journalism. I was encouraged by the radically liberal Mrs. Adams who fueled my editorials each written with the intention to correct the latest injustice on my radar. Full of ambition, with Woodward and Bernstein as my patron saints, I wrote my way into an internship for the local newspaper. There at my spindly desk parallel to the editor smoking away on his pipe, I clinked away on a manual typewriter that surely had been rescued from someone's attic. Visually it looked like my dreams had manifested. That is, until you happened to glance at the copy in my machine. Naturally, I'd been assigned the obituaries. Well ok then, everyone must start somewhere! I vowed to myself to be the best obituary writer that exists. That was all fine and well until I reported with great flourish the death of the wrong person – a long-widowed, octogenarian sister who happened to have a twin. Seems I inadvertently switched the names of the sisters in my enthusiasm announced the wrong one had passed. I'm not sure her family or mine has forgotten. The lesson learned, however, is that when you no longer want to be assigned obituaries, make a mistake. How was I to know that my next assignment of reporting on Little League games would also prove to be a minefield!

On to college, I went, majoring in Communications, an up-and-coming field once called journalism. I immediately found my place on the staff of the school paper and could see a path

from there to that scented English garden, or at least a smoky newsroom. That was all good and well until I was blinded by love (or what looked like love). And in its pursuit, I lost touch with that passionate young girl. The girl who put her writing first above all. Where she went is another story altogether, but what is important is that I found her again.

I found that passionate girl who wanted to change the world with her writing. And because of my life experiences, the injustices I chose to pursue pertain to healthcare and a radically different approach. I began to write about taking back power – not politically – but personally and in regard to health because that was the story I've been born to share.

I also discovered along the way that I prefer to dangle my feet in a stream in France rather than England. I learned that my writing is best fueled by real work with clients and interactions with those I teach. The everyday stories of individuals in pursuit of better health is incredibly inspiring. I am also constantly reminded just how difficult it is to make a lasting change when you are surrounded by a culture that doesn't support a natural approach to health. And so here I am tasked with sharing a message that's foreign to what is commonly accepted yet resonates with the truth that many have come to know for themselves.

Breaking this down and delivering it in an accessible and believable format is a challenge, and it requires more of me than I sometimes feel I have to give. To speak from a place of my own truth and experience is the only way this can be authentically conveyed. So did I really need to come to France to find that deep connection? Maybe not. Maybe so. Have I plugged right in as I'd hoped? The answer is yes and no. It's

different because first I discovered there was some preliminary work to do. Before I could get to the rich, juicy writing I had to make friends with myself. I mean really, I thought I had checked that off several meditation retreats ago. Seriously. Apparently, I needed to be even better friends. Friends with the parts of myself I don't really appreciate, like the critical, the shameful – and yes – even the fearful part of me. Oh dear.

So how has this gone, you might ask? Well, it's interesting what living alone can do for you, especially if you are used to the busy-ness of being around family. While being completely alone as I am may sound unbelievably delightful but let me share that it is just a bit scary as well. For instance, when you are all alone there is actually no one to blame your grumpy mood on but yourself, and at the same time there is no one around to shift that but you. That's a lot of personal responsibility!

And so here I am, and each morning looks a lot like the picture above. It's my writer's retreat for beginners. I wake, meditate, eat my fruit, make my tea and write without fail. Sometimes what I write is pretty damn good and sometimes, as Anne Lamott says, it's "a really shitty first draft". But I've already discovered this time away is about so much more than writing. It's about making friends with all of me so they can join in and help me write this next book.

Be sure to follow me @LaurenHubele on Instagram for a daily feed of photos from #30daysofwriting in the Pyrenees.