

## Balancing Creativity and Resilience

My writing experience over the years has been a journey about who I am and what I need to thrive. Allowing myself time and space and seeking out the support I require to write has made me realise the delicate balance we need to develop as writers. Creativity is key, and yet the very sensibilities that allow us to be creative can make us vulnerable to the common problems writers face: procrastination, self-doubt, rejection and dejection.

How can we then continue, in the face of all this and the backdrop of the pain of everyday life and a world gone mad? As is ever the case, love is the answer. Reminding ourselves why we write is vital in building up stores of stamina we can draw from when things get tough. The thrill of writing, our love of language is what sets us on this quest. Whatever our writing is, it should be fun, it should begin with a spark of an idea that excites and intrigues us. This love we have for the words on the page, the ideas, the story, the characters, *this* feeling is what will shine out and resonate with readers. It becomes our joy, our healing and will sustain us when it all gets too much.

### Know Yourself

To support yourself as a writer, find out how you work best. What will take you to the next step of your writing project? Identify the problems you face and work actively to figure out solutions. It may be as simple as taking a walk, attending a specific course on writer's craft, or perhaps a few days away to focus on your work. Or maybe the answer is simply a plentiful supply of tea and biscuits. Whatever it is, once you've figured it out, allow yourself to meet that need wherever possible.

An important part of self-development is to figure out what kind of writer you are and do what works for you. I know I'm very easily distracted, thinking of ideas for book two when the first one isn't even complete. I can also be extreme in my writing habits, spending large chunks of time avoiding it, followed by obsessive bursts of writing. All the wishing in the world won't make me a more regular writer, working in an orderly and scheduled way. I know my process can be chaotic, but that's what works for me and I've accepted it and allow myself space to think about other projects without guilt.

### Be Kind to Yourself

It can be easy to slip into a negative mindset. Here are some things to bear in mind to avoid the common anxieties that writers fall prey to:

- Not everything you write has to be world changing. If you're struggling to get an idea down, allow yourself to write the rubbish version. You can fix it, you can change it.
- Yet, bear in mind, you don't know whose world you might change with your words.

- Writing should be fun! If you're enjoying the process, your writing will flourish. If you're not, it's time to take a break. Write what makes you happy and you can't go far wrong.
- Remember that writing is subjective and not everyone is going to 'get' your work. But that's ok! Find the people who do.
- Rejection is a very common and normal part of a writer's experience. We only hear about the success stories, but this is very far from the full picture. I've heard of people aiming for 100 rejections, which I think is a lovely idea as it makes us rethink how we frame rejection. Collecting them in this way would be freeing, allowing us to treat each submission as the achievement it really is.
- Every time you submit your work it is an act of bravery. Celebrate the submission regardless of the result.

### **Editing Tips**

Writers must also be resilient while editing their work. This is the hard bit, where you have to be tough on yourself and make those difficult decisions about what to cut out and what to change. Here are some editing tips I've picked up along the way:

### **Find Support**

There are many ways to get support for your writing through writing groups, online events and social media. However, handing over your work to someone else can be difficult, especially if you know it's not perfect. Find family members or friends, people you are comfortable with and who enjoy reading, and would be willing to give you honest feedback. Even if you can find one regular reader who will comment on your work, this will be invaluable.

### **What's the Point?**

Before you start editing, it's important to figure out what you're trying to achieve in your writing. A way to do this is to produce a short description of your work in progress without mentioning:

- 1) The plot
- 2) The setting
- 3) The characters

This will help you establish the main themes of your work. Do this exercise and have the outcome of it at the forefront of your mind. Other ideas may sneak into your writing along the way. If you don't know your themes while you're editing, you won't know what to cut out.

### **Listen to Yourself**

Record yourself reading your writing. Then replay it while following the words. Mistakes will instantly jump out at you as you hear it.

### **Break it Down**

If the editing process is becoming confusing, break down your edit to check for different things. Focus on the dialogue to ensure what's being said is believable and in keeping with the character. Then do a structural edit, ensuring everything is in the right place. Go back to the start and do a copy edit, checking for continuity, looking at every word, proof reading, fact checking and so on. This more focused approach may make it easier to concentrate on smaller, more manageable tasks.

### **Practice Flash**

Writing flash fiction really helped me sharpen my editing skills. I spent a month writing a thirty-word story every day and I would regularly go over the word count trying to convey the feeling or idea I wanted to express. The ruthless process of cutting these stories to thirty words felt painful at the start. Yet over time, it became extremely satisfying to strip away the excess, revealing the power of the words that remained.

But above all, the golden rule of editing is, never throw anything away. Keep it to be used or recycled later. You never know when you might resurrect an idea, a line or a paragraph to rework into something else.

Wishing you all the best in the adventure that is your writing journey.

With love,

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