

Writing's A Bitch – So Is Soul Searching

BY HAROLD STEARLEY

Warning: This might get heavy. If you don't like reading more than 140 characters stop now. If you don't like introspection and self-examination, turn around. If you don't like thinking about the writing life, expansion of consciousness, freedom or soul searching, well you know...

We all know it, writing is a bitch.

Some days, while standing in the line at the grocery store, the words just flow, like we are channeling from the Universe, and we're scrambling for a piece of paper before they're gone. We know that they can never be recalled in the exact fashion we first held them.

Other days, we sit staring at the screen and nothing comes, the mind is numb. And some days, you just need to jump in the car and drive 1400 miles to that cabin in the middle of nowhere to kill off all of the distractions, to force yourself inward, to open the gate, to find the words, your true voice and, similarly, to find your soul.

I just completed the drive.

I do a lot of driving in the early morning hours. Up at 1:00, out the door by 2:00. You can cover a lot of distance before the rest of the world is stirring. But there's an eerie quality to driving at that time of day, depending on where you're at. Good highways, good lighting, good signage, city lights, and especially the moon can all be warming – they add definition to that dark and empty landscape.

But then the navigator wants to save you some time and you're

off on that two-lane, undivided highway, with no shoulders, no lights, few reflectors, and sometimes no center lines, and you wonder what the hell are you going to run up on as you fly down that gray ribbon at 70 miles per hour, give or take.

So, I latched onto a truck, a single, box-like entity sharing this 100-mile radius. I know that guy will light the road ahead of me, and he's going in my direction. I can tell he is following his navigator too – headed straight for the left-hand turn we are both supposed to take down that next stretch of lonely highway.

He comes to a stop, no turn is there; a concrete barrier instead. We both sit in silence, then slowly head down the road a mile, execute a U-turn and come back to where the mysterious road is supposed to be, but this time from the other direction. A right turn appears and we are headed south.

I guess navigators don't see all of the barriers – neither do we, especially the ones we create for ourselves.

As we speed away, I suddenly see a blast of dust kick up on the roadway. The trucker's trailer, blowing sideways in the high winds, dipped off the edge of the road into the dirt. The trailer heaves up to the right as the dirt grabs hold of the tires, left-sided tires leave the pavement, skyward bound. I thought it might flip, but it doesn't roll. He somehow pulls it back on the road. I'm glad for him.

Time to back off a bit, back into the darkness. Sometimes we spend time there figuratively as well, avoiding our own light.

Our minds are jealous beasts. They want to control the environment, to tell you what it is you are seeing and experiencing, but there is little you can see in this time and

place. The mind wants to fill the darkness, fill that void with something familiar – give it shape, give it form. And so it does.

Outlines of mountains that aren't really there. Cloud formations. The moon, three-quarters full, slowly becomes round and full – the circle complete, but then it sets. You realize these things aren't there and you still can't really tell where you are going. Nothing but headlights punching a momentary hole in the darkness and tail lights glowing red behind.

Nothing in front of you and nothing behind you beyond where those lights can reach, where their rays dissipate, swallowed by the night. You hold on for dawn and pray for it. And when it finally comes, when those first slivers of light pierce the darkness, you've traveled some 300 miles and you awake in a different landscape. No longer the flat Texas panhandle.

Instead, there are mountains and cacti and desert chaparral. A freight train appears to the east momentarily dissecting the plain and the road, from the mountains. You instinctively count cars, register if they're carrying grain or coal. It's hard to shut that brain off.

But the new world floods your senses and it is pleasingly disorienting. It stops the mind, the internal dialog. All you can do is experience, take it all in. Time and space have expanded from the simple act of driving out of your boundaries. You see, people's worlds seem to be in a constant state of contraction.

When we were children we experienced those endless days of summer because we lived freely in the here and now. Our imaginations raced, we played, we observed, we wondered, we were always wowed. Nothing was taken for granted. We weren't reined in by fabricated definitions or borders. The sky could be red if we wanted it to be. We played in foreign lands. The

thickets and woods were a jungle. A cat, a mountain lion. We weren't bound by math or history or science, only the limits of our senses and what we could dream up. Our worlds expanded. Time stood still.

The essence changed slightly in our teens. Still free of societal responsibilities, we became invincible. Play took different forms, sometimes more dangerous, stretching the limits, but there was always laughter. We swung the world by its tail. We owned the here and now.

But as we age, the boundaries and borders come. We have been force-fed society's definitions and bound by its rules. We are assigned roles to play. Told dreams aren't real, and never can be. We are given work. Our identities narrow. Time and space begin to contract. Our worlds shrink. At first to a community sphere, family and friends, a home and job, and eventually a smaller home when the kids have grown, then a room as we become feeble, and then gone.

We fill our shrinking world with distractions and we've created massive amounts of media to do just that. Television, movies, computers, social media, smartphones – these all make us feel like we are interacting with a larger universe. No longer confined to that commute to and from work in a box on wheels, in a ten-by-twelve living room, in that eight-by-eight office space. These prisons without bars.

If we're lucky, and perhaps diligent, we can maintain some of that childlike view of the world. We might even travel while our bodies are able, and we should. Travel expands space and time. Travel, breaking out of our self-imposed boxes, is freedom. Freedom to experience anew.

One thing we seem to want to avoid, that is always available to us, is that inward journey. We are always filling our voids with outside experiences, seeking solutions outside of ourselves, searching for another person to be with, anything

to keep from looking inside. Not all of the external is bad, and it should still be pursued.

We are social animals, and the unfamiliar internal world can be frightening. And so, we often do anything we can to avoid truly engaging in introspection and self-examination, figuring out who you are, and exploring the soul.

It can be painful work.

Some even lose themselves to a communal identity. They speak in clichés and platitudes, and they exercise as little independent thought as possible. They meld in. They try not to think or reason, punch the time clock and become a job, wrap their identity up in an external definition.

"I am a mother, a father, a teacher, a wife, a husband, a homeowner, a gardener, a doctor, a forklift driver."

They don't mention that they're a spirit soul. Or that they're here to find a soul purpose. Or that they're preparing for a spiritual life after the body is gone.

People will do anything to avoid their true self. And if you start down that road of soul-seeking, you won't come back to the mundane world of clichés, you won't be "right as rain," or "roll with the punches," or "go with the flow".

What you will be is *authentic*. You'll see with a clarity that you've never had before. You'll be true to your word. You will feel the world's vibrations, sense its moments.

Your intuition will magnify, you'll know people before you

meet them. You'll know your own heart. You'll feel it when another beats in synch with yours.

So I drove. Travel, motion through the external world, tears down walls, eliminates those borders, returns us to the world of no boundaries, frees our imagination, takes back our minds, and recharges our spirits.

It's back to that endless summer, clouds that form faces and animals, feeling the grass between my toes, living in the here and now, no distractions from the expansive world around me. I can look into my soul here, for when the world expands, it expands in all directions, including inward.

Funny thing, I was stopped by the Border Patrol – literally this time instead of figuratively – and I had to declare where I was coming from and where I was going. I could just imagine that officer's reaction if I had told him I was coming from the world of illusion and going to the real world, the place where the spirit roams free.

Our bodies will eventually fail, our worlds will contract, and freedom of movement will be gone. We'll be trapped inside with only ourselves for a while. We might want to get to know our real selves, make that spiritual journey inward, and free the spirit before that happens. Why wait to be dancing in the light?

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [The Year of Magical Thinking](#) .

Sip a little more:

[Found Your Arrowhead? Seek This Counsel In The Natural World](#)

"When we are asleep
in this world, we are
awake in another."

- Salvador Dali

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