

Why I Write or Why I Don't do Something Else

"I literally don't quite feel right if I haven't written for a while. A week is about as long as I can go without getting extremely edgy. It's like a fix. It really is a compulsion."

-J. K. Rowling in Newsweek, July 2000

Why do I write? Because math is hard.

TRUFAX.

Ok not really. I'm actually pretty good at math. I went all the way through calculus, even though I could have gotten away with stopping after Algebra II/Trig. Physics and chemistry were actually pretty interesting, too. But now I'm just avoiding the question.

Somewhere along the line in elementary school, I had a teacher or two who gave us open-ended writing assignments. I don't have very vivid memories of what everyone wrote, except for the crew of boys who basically wrote their own play-by-play sports broadcasts (or maybe they just retold the games they'd watched, I wouldn't know). I think I made up a story about my mom and I shrinking after eating cookie dough, maybe? Nothing memorable, but it was a start.

It was third grade when I figured out that I am a writer. It was probably a free-writing assignment, and I remember loving the feeling of writing. Looking back on the piece I wrote, I think I borrowed extensively from a skit on *All That*, but that didn't change the fact that I loved writing it. I had a few more teachers who just let us cut loose- one of them got us using inspiration from real life as opposed to creating everything on our own, which led to her story about losing her contact lens in a cave.

Middle school was when the epidemic hit. My friends and I were into the Star Wars craze when the prequels came out, and we started writing out ideas for when we pretended to be Star Wars characters. Then that turned into more writing than play planning, and my friend created her own character since I always wanted to be Leia or Amidala and she was sick of being guys. From there, it spiraled as we started writing the history for her renegade Jedi character, which proved to be endlessly entertaining ("You're right about one thing," said Aleia coldly. "I'm not logical." With that, she turned off her lightsaber and let herself fall off the ledge).

We had another friend who was less into Star Wars but still into writing, so she was writing things involving whichever boyband we liked at the time. Eventually, Star Wars passed out of fashion and the new obsession became the X-Files. Even though we'd long since abandoned acting out our own scenes, we still made up a whole cast of our own X-Files characters. We would pull in characters from other shows, movies, real life... and I believe one of mine ended with "And then Harry Potter woke up."

From high school on, those of us who still wrote improved drastically and started taking writing much more seriously, but I think the answer to that original question lies in horrible middle school fanfic. As terrible as our stuff was at the time, I never realized until later how *weird* it was that we wrote for fun. We literally read our stories to each other at the lunch table and wrote

together, as opposed to playing with makeup or talking incessantly about boys, or whatever normal twelve year old girls do. One of our friends tried to write a fanfic for her favorite anime just to fit in with all the writing chatter at our lunch table, and she's said in more recent years that she felt left out or like there was something wrong with her since she wasn't into writing. It really wasn't until I was in high school, learning how to write a literary essay in freshman English, that I realized most people considered writing to be hard work or a real pain. On some level, I knew that my classmates didn't just write for fun, but it didn't register with me just how odd our little habit was. My original partner-in-crime and I were still writing fanfics (her Matrix and my Harry Potter) and cranking out pages, and while I knew I was different as a writer, it never occurred to me how difficult it was for others to what came so naturally to me.

In the end of middle school, I went through a brief poetry phase, but marching band put a quick end to that. After I had my evenings and weekends back in November, something didn't feel right, like there was a void that band practice had been masking. I can't remember when it hit me that I hadn't written anything in a while, but that's when I decided that I had to write something, even if it wasn't mine. That's when I started planning out my version of the next Harry Potter book (fifth at the time), and I felt *right*. There's really no other way to explain it. Planning, writing, incessantly editing, it seemed like my mind was working correctly for the first time in months. I never did finish that one; I lost interest and picked up a Star Wars fanfiction that summer. Throughout high school, I didn't have a lot of completely original material (and I think I killed off my friend's renegade Jedi in one draft), but my personal writing notebooks filled up faster than my class notes. Sometimes I was just teasing out a "what if" I had about a series, other times I just wanted to see more of the characters, but no matter what the inspiration, I just knew I had to write.

There is, of course, a big wrench in that version of the story. Writing isn't the only thing I consistently come back to. I was a musician (or student of music is probably more accurate for a seven year old) before I was a writer. I was the kid who enjoyed the simplified Beethoven pieces I had in elementary school. I was the weird kid who actually practiced. I think I outstripped my parents' musicality in late middle school, and even today I pick up Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* to hack around for fun. I play French horn, the member of the brass family that takes the most dedication and frustration just to play, little less improve (seriously, my horn teacher agrees that we're all a little masochistic for picking this instrument). Music isn't something I am capable of taking lightly, and like writing, it will always maintain a hold over my life.

Writing is what I chose to go into, but for two years before I formally declared my minor, I played in the top GVSU ensemble and took private lessons, "just for fun." Despite my musicality, I just never saw myself as any kind of professional musician (and my reasons for staying out of music education could be a separate rant paper in themselves), and several people had vehemently told me "DON'T get a music minor, it won't get you ANYWHERE," so I had planned to just play in an ensemble like I had in high school. It was in my sophomore year that I realized that a music minor would only require twelve more music credits on top of what I was already doing, so I finally allowed myself to indulge.

When I write, I get a sense of satisfaction, and that all is right with the world. I do get excited when I really like something I've created. When something doesn't work, I get mildly frustrated, but I know I can come back to it later with a different, less stressed state of mind. Editing is half the fun. I can be emotionally invested, but I feel like I'm still in control. If I haven't written for a while, it all comes back to me fairly quickly, something

for which I'm very grateful.

Music has always been more extreme for me. Sometimes it brightens my entire day if I had a particularly good lesson, or if we had a great concert. I often lock myself in a practice room with a piano if I need to cheer up. I have considered many times that I might be chickening out by going for the "safer" professional writing degree instead of a performance degree. I sit second chair in the top ensemble, second to Scott who's played professionally for 20-plus years (he's back for a teaching degree). Admittedly I'm a big fish in a small pond when it comes to GVSU's horn studio, and our third chair player has a better high range than me, but I'm still on even footing with majors. I also have perfect (or near-perfect, we're not sure) pitch, meaning I can (usually) correctly identify any random note I hear; although students learn to identify intervals and memorize a few common pitches, true perfect pitch is a natural skill that cannot be taught, so there are plenty of majors who would kill to have it. Sometimes I can't help but feel like I'm wasting all this by not going into a music career.

Then I walk out of an especially stressful band rehearsal wondering if I should drop music entirely, or I'm fighting the physical limitations of playing a wind instrument. Both of my instruments have occasionally reduced me to tears. That's when I'm reminded of just how much dedication and constant practice it takes to succeed in music, and that I just don't have the patience to nitpick that thoroughly. It's been said, "When you are not practicing, remember, someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet him he will win." I can't handle that kind of competition and pressure. There are people I know who practice four or five hours in a day and say it's still not enough; I can handle an hour, two maximum if I'm focused. I just get burnt out. I take a month off every summer, which usually turns into two, and then I finally remind myself that auditions are coming up.

I can't even think about what I would be if I didn't write. My blog is proof of that. Even when I'm not writing a story, I'm updating my journal at least once a week. It's not always a lot, and a "friends only" setting is definitely not an ideal situation for furthering my writing, but it's more proof that writing, in any form, is simply something that needs to happen for me. Not to mention that, while publication is still competitive, he who writes the most does not necessarily win. It's not like I physically lose the ability to construct a story, whereas a mere week of missed practice could cost a musician his or her job. We all have different writing processes, so I don't feel like it's a competition or a race.

I've heard it said, I think by my grandma but she was quoting, that if you can find something that you like to do that everyone else thinks is a real chore, then that's probably what you should be doing with your life. That's essentially my philosophy with writing. I love doing something that frustrates most people, and I can't picture my life without it. I suppose I've found my calling, so I'm off now to find my muse.