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Writer's Block

By Abigail Dotson

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Eighteen months into my daughter's life, I sat down to write. About something. Anything. Two years ago, I had considered myself a writer. I knew that having a baby would mean less time to write; I anticipated tired bones dragging an aching body to the computer at three in the morning after a midnight feeding, or disregarding the pile of dirty dishes in the sink for twenty minutes with the keyboard during an afternoon nap. I had a romantic notion of an affair with my typewriter, finding each other in darkened hallways and spending a passionate five minutes touching, our time together always abruptly ended before we were ready. I knew I would be bursting with words desperately trying to come out, searching for outlets in each of my ten fingers; I imagined sleepless nights prolonged by an unrelenting urge to write wild fairytales that I would sprinkle with glitter and bind in a book for her sweet eyes to peruse as she grew. I thought that although the time would be sparse and of course I would never get to write everything I wanted, I would grasp those precious moments of peace with unheard of gusto, filling pages with drawings and poems and stories and other such craftiness. Never before had I had reason for such inspiration; the coming months would provide me with a wealth of creative fire, which I would put out little by little in the stolen minutes while she was napping or frolicking with her father. Imagination had been my buoy through life so far, keeping me afloat during even the most vicious of storms. I had felt love and death and brokenness travel through my blood and limbs to exit on a page of often sappy poetry and stories. And so, of course, in this most momentous time I was sure to be filled with such ideas as I had never experienced the likes of.

So I knew there would be little time, maybe even no time. I was prepared to feel frustrated and loaded with a traffic jam of creative genius. What nobody told me, what I didn't anticipate, was the complete lack of creative genius I actually felt. In all the classes and books and conversations with authentic mothers, no one ever told me that writers block was a possible side affect of giving birth. Those first few weeks when I sat down to excitedly to write the story of my daughters birth (an absolutely perfect night), I was shocked to find myself afflicted with writers block. For the first time in my life, I had nothing to say. But how could this be? Perhaps more than any other time in my life, there was so MUCH to say. And yet time and time again I hurried to the computer anxious to let the prose flow only to sit paralyzed. I eeked out miserable paragraphs, struggling with each sentence and never feeling fulfilled. I imagined my daughter reading these colorless words in the years to come and felt robbed of the gift I

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always assumed I would give her. The mother I was in my dreams recorded her first maternal days in a lively and dedicated journal, but I was quick to find out that we can't all be Anne Lamott. It seemed that raising a child, at least a newborn, was in and of itself such a creative trial that there was none left over. And I had (read: had) a relatively easy baby. She was mostly happy; she slept peacefully nestled next to me, waking often but only to nurse and fall back into dreams. Friends and family were constantly around, feeding us and taking turns admiring her infantness. I was happy—elated, even—adrenaline pumped but still tired (although looking back on those days, I think, crazily enough, not as tired as I am now). I was perhaps steeped in delusion, filled with a Wonder Woman—like feeling that not only would I, should I, raise this little baby of mine, but I would also write beautiful stories and poems and adventure tales. In my post—partum craziness, I didn't realize that I was spent. The hours of rocking and walking, of singing sweet lullabies and silly songs, conversations where I was the only one talking—

this was where my poetry was written. The experience was not so dull and uninspirational as to neglect provocation of creative endeavor, nor was I suddenly transformed into such a dull and uninspirational person as to inhibit imagination. I was simply redefining it for myself. Temporarily.

Eighteen months later I am only beginning to find words again. I am just starting to call myself a writer. I feel the spark again, deep in my gut, like an old friend I am so happy to let back in the door. My daughter still takes up most of my time. At eighteen months, she runs and plays and sings and talks; we dress up and kick down castles, dump out buckets of water and take long walks on the beach. There is hardly a moment to get a word down on paper, and sometimes I wait all week for that opening, only to find myself at a loss for words once again. But sometimes, when she has slept well the night before and had a relatively peaceful morning, she may fall asleep for an afternoon nap and I may have just enough energy to forgoe the nap and snuggle for an hour or two with the keyboard instead.

What I realized is that not only is raising a child all the things that everyone tells you: it is also an art form. Raising my daughter, right now, for me, is an art. I paint her and mold her and shape her and write her into each of my own dawns, and then I stand back and admire her as she learns to paint and mold and shape and write herself into each of her own days.

Abigail lives in Southern California with her daughter Ruby Jane. Her work has appeared in the anthology *Loving Mama: Essays on Natural Parenting and Childbirth*, on *Mothering Magazine's* website, and in *Growing Up In Santa Cruz*.

Thawing Your Writer's Block

By Mary Anne Hahn

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When I go through bouts of writer's block, my fingers stiffen, and my brain goes as blank as the snowy screen of a television on the fritz.

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I don't know about you, but I picture writer's block as something cold—like the frozen engine of a car in the dead of winter, or the way your PC sometimes "freezes up" on you when your system gets too busy.

Looking at it that way actually helps to overcome it. Rather than feeling like you are grasping at fog, visualizing writer's block as something three-dimensional can provide you with both the strength to confront it, and the weapons to conquer it.

How can you thaw your writer's block of ice? Try any or all of the following:

1. Chip away at it. No need to write "War and Peace" in one sitting; Tolstoy certainly didn't. Fifteen minutes a day are all you need to give your writing dream some life and structure. Use them to write anything, anything at all—as many article ideas as you can think of, a synopsis of a story idea, a climactic scene in your novel, a limerick, a character sketch, step by step instructions for making the perfect omelet or what you would do if you won the lottery.

Have some fun with these 15-minute exercises, and you'll probably rediscover the truth in the adage that "time flies" when you do.

2. Light a match to it. By this I mean, don't think about the fact that you are not currently writing; rather, think about why you ever wanted to be a writer in the first place. Better yet, **write** about why you want to be a writer. Do you have stories burning inside you that need to be told? Or do you see writing as your key to personal fulfillment or freedom? Melt away writer's block by reigniting your passion for writing—the old daydreams, the past feelings of triumph or accomplishment when you finished a piece of work.

3. Carve a sculpture out of it. If you simply can't break it down or melt it away, make something from your writer's block of ice. As I did above, write about how you feel when you experience writer's

block, or what you think writer's block looks like. Maybe look for humor in it ("What did one writer's block say to the other?" "Nothing—it couldn't find the right words!" Okay, that's a bit lame, but you get the idea).

Whenever writer's block tries to come between you and your writing aspirations, don't try to avoid it. Instead, face it head on. Play

with it, laugh at it, scoff at it, or befriend it. Make it something that you can take into your hands and deal with.

Turn it into one more tool that you can use to achieve your writing success.

Mary Anne Hahn is editor and publisher of "WriteSuccess," THE biweekly ezine of ideas, information and inspiration for writers. To subscribe, <mailto:writesuccess-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>



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