

Rewriting the Writer: returning to writing after illness

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<http://greatstorybook.com/rewriting-writer-returning-writing-illness/>

This is about rewriting the writer - and more specifically, me.

For the past month and a half, I've been struggling with rather serious health problems, and this is why you haven't seen anything new here for a while and why you haven't heard anything from me – not in emails, comments, or our Facebook Group.

Artwork by Unsplash.

After a long time away from writing for GSB, I'm finally back. This is my weird story, involving a lot of yuck, a 30-second stint as a spy and a dawn of realization at the poolside.

There are all sorts of reasons for not writing. Some of them might be good reasons, some excusable. Most of them though are just stupid. My reason was that: just really, really stupid. Maybe that's why it was so hard to forgive myself for it.

So what's the story, lady?

I know you want to know what was wrong with me. I've been weighing out my desire to keep this to myself with my sense that you have a right to know where the heck I've been all this time. I decided to give it to you straight-up.

It started out with my ignoring a simple cold until it progressed into Bronchitis. I did my best to slow down (which wasn't very good, looking back on it), but still didn't really pay too much mind to what I should be doing. I was working as usual.

Landing in Bed

The Bronchitis progressed into lung problems that landed me bedridden for several weeks, and that progressed into a thrombosis and consequent lung embolism. Guess I'm not in my 20s anymore.

If you've ever had any of this, you have a fair idea of how difficult it was for me to breathe, let alone do anything else. If you don't know what these things are, I'll just sum it up with this: it's good to be here.

Once I realized how truly sick I was, I thought about my mortality a lot. I've never been one to dwell on that kind of thing, but it was just there all the time, bugging me. Every breath was a chore and things were hurting that shouldn't.

Making my daughter a sandwich was enough to cause my body strain. I had so little energy; everything was exhausting. So I had to do less. Less of everything, including the things I really love to do - and

that's when depression set-in.

I was spending a lot of time in the quiet and the darkness. Living in a small European town, that's pretty easy to do.

Hiding in the Dark

I didn't want to be around people or sunlight. Stupid, I know. But somehow those things seemed like too much. I needed quiet - I needed to not have to strain for breath. *If I didn't have any kind of excitement, I would have less difficulty breathing.* I tried to just stay calm, quiet, dark.

It was sort of like when you sprain an ankle. You favor that ankle and walk with a limp.

My going into the quiet and dark was my favoring my lungs. But doing that was putting a strain on the rest of me – namely, my need to be around life.

Just breathing.

After a while, I had accepted not being able to write or draw or paint or go for a walk. I was dwindling down, whittling down to less and less of what makes me who I am. I just had to breathe.

I did breathing exercises, but those are really exhausting and they hurt. You can't do that for too long. So I went towards the dark and the quiet and that became my new reality. Having always had very sensitive hearing, any sudden noises would startle me. They didn't belong in my blanketed reality.

Turning it Around

Two weeks ago, the summer really hit for the first time and I was very annoyed. People are louder when the sun shines like that. Stupid sun. They drive more, they listen to more music and they talk louder too. I'm sure of it.

It was beautiful and sunny outside. I wanted to vomit. Our next-door neighbors are incredibly friendly people who have a pool, and they let us use it whenever we want. Their one stipulation is that no child go swimming in it all alone, a more than fair rule.

They wanted to go swimming. Beh.

I have a daughter, and sunny day plus pool equals go-swimming-five-minutes-ago. Steffan thought it a great idea. I was tired. So I told my family to go down to the pool and I would rest with some quiet and darkness.

They didn't want to go without me, but I insisted. I sort of begged. "Please. Go." I'm really lovely like that.

I listened impatiently to their footfall down the apartment stairwell. The front door opened and closed

again. Relief. Quiet. I was in the quiet for a little while at least. Now at last I could rest and just be alone.

I heard something.

But I did hear my daughter make a little noise that I couldn't identify as good or bad. So I went out to the balcony and found her down at the pool. My daughter was squealing at the shock of cold water and giggling about it. Steffan was smiling, fishing dead bugs and pollen out of the pool with a giant net.

No one looked up to wave and smile at me. They probably thought I was already in bed. Really, I felt like a spy, spying on my own family. I was a spy! At last, one of my great desires fulfilled. I revelled in the pleasure of knowing that no one knew where I was or what I was doing.

It was really, really fun for about 10 seconds.

The next part happened much more slowly. About 20 seconds.

Evaluating my manuscript.

I realized I was observing my life and not really living it. But I wasn't sure that was all bad, so I dove a little deeper and really observed my life - as a story. Maybe you do this too sometimes.

I asked myself, "If I were writing this scene, what would I want the protagonist (me) to do?" It didn't take me long to realize the story at that moment, right *in that very moment* with me on the balcony, had reached an important turning point.

As the writer, I had a 3-prong set of options for my character's plot:

1. If the protagonist turned to go back inside, the rest of the story would have to be written as a drama with her sad, pathetic death. It could only spiral down that way. The moment would be symbolic of her willingness to leave life behind. I don't like dramas, especially ones about self absorbed protagonists who are full of flaws so that you don't feel quite so bad when they kick it.
2. The protagonist could return to her computer and get back to work, but then the story would most likely turn into a mid-life crisis melodrama wherein she first alienates her family before a bittersweet death that follows her saying - wheezing, actually - and on the dark deathbed, how sorry she was that she didn't go swimming whilst she still had the chance. (Notice the "whilst" - love it.) *Wheeze* Cough.** And done.
3. But if I (said protagonist) stuffed my blubbery butt into a bathing suit and slogged down the stairs, even if only to sit at the poolside, there was a chance this story might end well. So that's what I did. I refuse to write the kind of mega-drama story that ticks people off so much that they throw the book across the room. *I certainly don't want to live a life that reads like that.*

Getting down to rewriting the writer.

So I turned to my wardrobe and put a great deal of effort into shoveling myself down, up and sideways into my swimsuit. There was grunting involved, and sweating, which did not help the process. I think I

got rug burn, if you can get rug burn from a thin little slice of swimwear.

But I did it. Whew. Well, now there was no question: I was going *into* that pool, for sure. I grabbed a towel and limp-breathed slowly down the stairs. I was going to be with my family and in the water too.

The people I love so much were surprised and happy to see me. I confessed at watching them from the balcony and feeling like I wanted to be part of it.

Yes, I want to be part of the shock of cold water and fishing dead bugs and pollen out of the pool and probably my hair. It's all part of it, all of it. There's no editing that out and why would you ever really want to?

I'm glad to be here. Bugs and all.

I no longer take breathing for granted. I'm still rebuilding my immune system and my muscle mass. But I'm here, and I'm really glad. Happily, I'm back to writing again (as you read). One of my favorite things to do.

“Keep creating, no matter what.” That's always been my motto. Now I can say it, write it, declare it - with a different feeling about what that really means to me. So now I'll write it again, and for you as well.

Keep creating, no matter what.
