

Adventures in Ink



My gratitude
runs deep.

Hi First name / friend —

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for being a part of my writing life. Introverted me has learned that connecting with readers is the BEST part of being a writer, and it means a lot to know you're out there on the other side. Thank you!

Ever since I announced my summer writing project, I've gotten some lovely emails and some great questions! I love hearing all the ways you are living your poem and diving deeper into your purpose. So today I wanted to share some of my answers more widely, in case these things are on others' minds as well.

1. Do you use an outline?

Great question! If you've spent even a minute in writing circles, you've likely heard there are plotters (who outline, plan, etc.) and there are pantsers (who write by the seat of their pants). I find I am most happy and productive at the junction where plotter meets pantser: where yes, I've planned, and now things are going off the rails.

This makes me think of something my cello teacher told me recently about how to get the best sound. (Cellists are ALWAYS looking for ways to improve sound!). One consideration (among many) is selecting the contact point (where the bow meets the string) between the bridge and fingerboard. Laura said it's easier to play near the fingerboard, but a better sound can be achieved at that point where the bow has to fight just a little bit, where there's a bit of tension.

It's the same for first-drafting: I need an outline to help keep me grounded enough to know where my main character needs to end up. BUT there

enough to know where my main character needs to end up... BUT there should be some struggle as I write, some sense of freedom and discovery, so that the characters and story can guide me, instead of the other way around.

If this sounds like something you'd like to try, check out Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat*. Create your story "beats," but don't be so tied to them that you miss a wonderful story development. Case in point: in the book I've been drafting this summer, I had my "high tower surprise" all mapped out, and then my character came along and chose a different "high tower surprise" that's even better! FUN!

2. When is a poem finished?

Umm...when the timer rings? (My time-management strategies include creating blocks of writing time! When the time is up, I must move on!)

I wish I had a better answer to this question, but the truth is, I think poems are a lot like cats; they have (at least) nine lives. Maybe a poem is NEVER done. And maybe the best thing we can do for a poem is stop tinkering with it. I have definitely seen how the heart can be revised right out of a poem...it can be hard to trust ourselves enough to believe that the poem has achieved its purpose (even if it's not perfect, whatever "perfect" is!).

Something I do that may sound a little oddball is to ask my poem: *is that it? is that what you wanted to say?* Sometimes my poem nods happily, and I know I'm done. Other times the poem whispers, *come back later*. Often a poem I've abandoned will find me in the middle of the night, and I know exactly what I need to try next time we visit. *Aside: I have learned that the only way to remember these middle-of-the-night conversations is to record them immediately. I use the "Notes" feature on my cell phone.*

to record them immediately. I see the notes feature on my cell phone, and then in the morning I have no trouble getting my writing day started.

3. If you were stranded on a deserted island, what book would you want to have with you?

I love this question! Poetry, for sure. Probably *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. Oh, the truth and comfort and wisdom! Also, a contemporary anthology I have loved for a number of years now is *Poetry of Presence*, edited by Phyllis Cole-Dai and Ruby R. Wilson. I keep it on my nightstand. Thank you so much for asking.

Wishing you a lovely August, whether that takes you back to school or to the beach or both or neither! I'm here if you want to chat.

Irene

P.S. Good news about that summer writing project: I hit “the end” of my first draft. YAY!! Now: Time to let it rest. And soon I will dive back in...



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