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It's Time to Begin

Beginning is the hardest part of anything. Right now, I struggle with beginning to view myself as a writer. I take comfort in the fact that Joan Didion claimed, "...it took me some years to discover what I was. Which was a writer." Some writers, like George Orwell, claim to have known early on in life that they were meant to be writers¹. Those people scare me, but also make me laugh. Who really knows that they will be writers when they are five? I am nineteen years old, have endured fifteen years of schooling, and if you asked me "what I am," I would look like a deer caught in headlights.

The sad truth is I write because I am told to. I infrequently find myself writing about what I want, or veering from the guidelines of an assignment.

Are you thinking, "Why the hell is this chick minoring in writing if she only writes because she is told?" Well, good question. I understand that only writing because of an assignment is not necessarily a good motivation. But, it's better than not writing at all. Writing assignments make me consider areas of discussion I may have otherwise skipped over and allows me to discover thoughts that otherwise may have been left unexplored. So to answer your question, I chose to pursue writing because it's a challenge, but more importantly, it's a challenge I often learn from.

Plus, baby steps! Beginning takes time.

Time.

Time is why I infrequently write or read. Maybe I am making excuses, but I truly feel like I never have free time. In the summer when I do have time to myself, I try to read, but it isn't my first instinct. Currently on my nightstand sits a book, *Nineteen Minutes* by Jodi Picoult, that I began during December break; it's half read, and I am yearning to finish it. Yet, the times I am not busy finishing homework, going to class, or attending meetings, I find myself sitting and talking with friends. And eating; constantly popping Dove dark chocolate into my mouth.

Time. It's a bad excuse.

¹ George Orwell, Joan Didion, and Joyce Carol Oates are all well-known authors, who have won many awards and are frequently studied in English classes. All three have wrote pieces on why they write, and what it means to be a writer.

My goal from here on out is to read and write more. I would declare, “to write more,” but it seems like they come hand in hand: “Read widely, read enthusiastically, be guided by instinct and not design. For if you read, you need not become a writer; but if you to become a writer, you must read.”² I will begin by finishing *Nineteen Minutes*.

Baby steps! One day, I will be a writer. I just need time and a beginning. But as I mentioned earlier, bold declarations from renowned writers, like Oates and Orwell, scare me and make me anxious to begin.

Orwell claims, “sheer egoism,” “historical impulse,” and “political purpose” are the three main motivations for writing. I disagree. If those were the main motivators I would be shit out of luck. I’d like to think that I don’t have a large ego, not that a large ego is a bad quality, it’s just not my cup of tea. And I definitely know I am not motivated by history or politics. Yuck yuck yuck to both. Once again, I admire those who have these interests, but not my cup of tea. What motivates me is passion for a subject.

Passion is enough for me. If you give me an assignment that I do not care about it will suck. But if it peaks my interest at all, I will at least produce a readable product. During my first semester of college I wrote a paper about cross modal plasticity, the reorganization of neurons in the brain that allows for adaptation to the loss of a sense. It was a topic that I was exposed to two years earlier and found extremely interesting, but never fully explored. Needless to say, I was ecstatic when the opportunity to write a paper about this complex topic presented itself. Even with my excitement, I was as slow as molasses when it came to beginning to write.

Time.

A watched pot never boils. The pot is my screen and the water is my assignment, and I watch and wait for the words to start bubbling and overflowing.

I fall under the category of people who stare at their computer screens for an hour and nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

² Oates, Joyce Carol

My mind is like a dancing flame below the pot: the thoughts never stop flickering, constantly changing shapes, swaying in different directions, settling for a minute and then sparking back up. When I write, thoughts keep radiating, just not the thoughts I need. It is as if everything that is unimportant flickers, smothering the needed heat of my writing flame.

I take a beat.

Turn the computer off and allow myself a short break from the pressure of writing. And it is normally during this break that the magic sentence ignites. It may not be the perfect sentence, or the sentence that appears in my final version, but it is still magical. The magic of this sentence lies in its power to get me writing. Regardless of the quality of words I begin to string together, the key is "I begin."