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## Introduction

This is the outcome of what happened when a talented, mid-life writer, a ravishing serial entrepreneur, a beautiful war widow and a woman obsessed with Sherlock Holmes, decided to take a deep dive into where their creativity lived. It was a brutal experiment that each woman was willing to undertake over a period of several months, to move forward on their writing journey.

Originally sharing their work as part of an eclectic writer's group, they realised along the way, that their creative path was one that all writers struggle with, no matter the genre. From day one, it seemed that anything they could share with the writing community at large; could only be a good thing.

*“Every writer wants to be read, and this little exercise helped all of us take a deeper breath and put pen to paper in a more honest and heartfelt way...”*

So, here is the exercise they undertook, and now it's your turn:

Grab a journal and find a writing space where you have privacy and feel safe. You can share your work later, either with a writer's group, or a woman's storytelling circle, or simply with an individual who values you and your craft. Write without censoring yourself, write as deeply as you can about each of the following words. It doesn't matter how short or long your response, if you feel engaged with the words and they are meaningful to you.

They may seem like eight little words, but you will find they have immense personal meaning and will require a degree of honesty you may not normally express in your writing. I noticed shortly after completing the exercise that my writing fell on to the page more easily than it had done in years (and I'm not one to generally experience writer's block).

**FAITH**

**DESIRE**

**EXPLORATION**

**PASSION**

**FEAR**

**MOXIE**

**BRAVERY**

**INTEGRITY**

Good luck and feel free to share if that feels appropriate. You can find me at [Jayne@jayneryder.com](mailto:Jayne@jayneryder.com). This is what mine revealed and what I found to be true for me. <sup>[OB]</sup>



Faith

## Faith First

For any writer starting out, and perhaps even for those who are well seasoned, one of the hardest things to do is to turn your fear into faith. Fear of what; you might ask? Fear is subjective, but many writers will tell you that they're frightened of their creative powers, the process of letting the muse take over and the simple act of allowing their craft. In other words, to not censor themselves. I believe writers need to understand their faith first and foremost; where it comes from and where it's leading them. So, here's how I would describe my own faith...

When I think about faith it's a noun that becomes a verb. It's something that has wilfully presented itself to me in many guises, it's something that appears and disappears but never leaves. Faith, life and death are completely entwined in my consciousness as three essences that become one, that drive all things, my(self) and all selves.

Faith to me is a perfume I used to wear, it's melancholia and hopefulness all rolled into one, it's the human sadness that will not go away because we need it; to grow, to evolve and when I smell that perfume out of the blue, it reminds me that my faith has grown.

As a young woman I once travelled across the world on a long flight. Next to me sat a boy, dark-eyed, handsome, eloquent, polite – we spoke for hours about deep things, and the flight seemed to be over in minutes not hours. As we stood to leave the aircraft I asked him if he would like to meet up in the city of our arrival and he looked at me with such sadness and said 'I have loved speaking with you and you are a wonderful woman, but we cannot meet – you see - you have no faith' (by that he was referring to religion) but I took it to mean something else and he was right – I had no faith. Not in myself, not in my ability to survive life and it stirred in me a great listening to the world. I turned my thoughts towards those who had needed great faith and were willing to wait for it to appear.

Today we are often encouraged to 'jump and the parachute will open, the angels will catch you, wings will appear' and it's in the very jumping that faith is born – you don't get a guarantee and sometimes you don't even get the wings; you do fall to the floor, into the abyss, and pieces get broken. But the faith that takes root in you, comes from your willingness to jump into the unknown, not because the outcome is positive or not.

Faith to me is not about an external God or validation from some other source that I can join or become a member of. It's already inside, it just needs watering, and its power allows the manifestation of wonderful things, limitless, glorious, wonderful things that can be shared and can touch others. Like bees busying themselves, cross-pollinating the garden, the universe; strands of faith touch and set alight everyone who comes to know it, they weave us together, allowing compassion for others.

Faith ultimately for me is like a knowing that can't be known, a flower that has died and now blooms on an invisible stem – it's perfume wafting towards me, waiting for me to look up.



*Desire*

## Oh, The Thrill of It All

Desire is out there on the edge, just the other side of love.

I am an ever-faithful fan, longing for the unobtainable prize, keeping vigil over the dreaming music and my object of desire.

Destroyed by a line from his song, a note from his voice so long loved, it's the echo of the sound that's been with me forever, a sensibility that I hold close to my heart, as soft as cashmere.

He can't leave because there's nowhere to go. He's just a dream, but stronger than life and he's mine to chase.

He is me because I am him, our sweat beads from the same waterfall, all the shine of his eyes and hair are mine, every step is my step, we are entwined in a mist of understanding, we are each other, and for all that - everyone; which is why we smile at strangers and hold our hands out to each other when we pass in our dreams.

My desire for him is diaphanous, hopeful, forever patterned by some shining grey bliss – but for all that - just out of reach.

Except... these are silly dreams. Or are they?

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I only know that my heart is the heart of a writer and is full of desire and silly dreams. Everything comes from this place of freedom and fantasy; it sows the breadcrumb trail. There is nothing else I need to do. A writer has no choice but to follow the signs and to burn it up - you have no purpose but to burn.

Words come tumbling from the heat, what's not said between the lines is gold, you have to keep running, keep following the underwater current, keep moving towards the resolution even if it means all desire will be stopped dead in its tracks; when there is - 'no more time for us'.

It's your job, you are the keeper, you have this affinity for a reason, don't waste it! It's not yours to waste. You aren't done till you are burned out, burned up – that's the point. Writers are fuel – get to it!

This is a messy business. You can't get away with a neat writer's life. It doesn't work that way - not if you have something to say.

The beat will keep you on track – desire is a 'one two three' - 'one two three' – then a Whoa! where did that move come from? So, Tango, go with the flow, the passion, the rhythm, and keep your toes pointed towards humanity.... That's your job.

‘And out of the blue love came rushing in – out of the sky came the sun – out of left field came a lovely day – out of the blue no more pain’

The dream is nearly at an end, desire is now the saxophone that won’t let go, the last ‘Bravo’, the tall dark singer lets his band drink the last of the audience’s glory because of his love for the music, his desire to commune.

His desire; unknown to us, but of our making.

So, show us your desire and what is of your making.

\* lyrics courtesy of 'Country Life' 1974 - Roxy Music



*Exploration*



## Only the Intrepid Need Apply

When I think of the 'kit' a writer needs in order to carve out a career with their words, I have in my mind's eye the intrepid explorer, driving forever forward into the blizzard; his huge backpack weighing him down as he traverses the snow. He is without doubt risking his life, but he has a well-thought-out plan, he has clothing and tents specially designed for adverse conditions and he has his trusty Sherpas, or his colleagues and, he has some way of reaching out or radio-ing back to base, if it all goes wrong. He is prepared, even though he 'knows not' what he will find.

When I first started out, exploring my own writing life, I stumbled across other writers and creative types, and I looked to them for a signal or sign that I was on the right track. There were some flashlights in the darkness, leading me this way and that, but ultimately, I realised that there is no right or wrong path, just you the writer, the empty page and the journey, which you must take alone.

So, I've learnt

### **To be intrepid**

The dictionary says this means to be 'invulnerable to fear or intimidation' and oh how this comes in all shapes and sizes!

### **To take risks**

I'm a risk taker by nature and have learned to live with the fall-out when it does go wrong, to find the upside, to pick myself up and start all over again but this is not just a writerly skill, as we all know... this is life asking you to give it everything you have.

### **To wait patiently for what's right for you**

If you are being paid to write, then it's likely that you're good at writing all sorts of things, and that there is a client at the end of the work who is expecting a certain tone or type of language-use. If you are a novelist or a genre writer, then again you may feel that your work is in some way prescriptive to that end. And whilst I would always encourage any writer - to 'just get started' I have learnt that there is something that will be particular to your writing, writing that only you could have written, writing that in some way is your personality in words (or the muse' personality) and that if you are patient enough, you will find that voice and it will be more powerful than all the others. It will move others in a way that matters.

### **To explore my craft inside and outside of itself**

This one is more difficult because not only does it mean delving deeply into the word-smithery of things, but it also means letting the 'craft itself' bleed out of its own skin and become something more, something new - something that will move new generations and be born of itself.

### **To stay true to the path even when it's in darkness**

Where there is truth there is light, where there is light there is beauty and where there is beauty your path will illuminate the path others have to tread - So stay true and never waver from your own truth.

### **To just 'feel' your way forward**

That inner radar, the gut feeling, the intuition - feel around in your kit bag for those things, they will sustain you, they will serve you, they are your soul's compass - ignore them at your peril: -

### **To share your journey**

If you are alone in your garret, your ivory tower, your cubicle and no one reads your work - the work is not yet done. We're here to co-create and to learn from others. So, share your 'real' journey and everything else will fall into place.

### **To help others overcome obstacles**

Sometimes our fellow writers are fully blinkered and lost for ways to get their writing out, to have it read and to get the feedback they crave. If you know someone is struggling, reach out and offer your suggestions - they can only say 'no' or it may prompt them towards their own answer.

### **To haul others to the top when their rope breaks**

One writer's success is everyone's success. We can all share in the beloved word finding a home and striking a chord. And if you're the one who has been successful, haul everyone else up to their next best step, give as much as you can, after all we are all one in humanity, and language will probably be the only thing that saves us in the end.

**To see with your 'other' senses and failing that invent some new ones**

Anything we write now, at this point is like the sparrow's footprint in the snow. It makes a dent in the universe, but as humanity evolves, we will need new language, new senses, new ways of seeing, new systems and new ways of describing them; to raise our consciousness and make life bearable for everyone on this planet. So, if you look down and the footprints are fading, warming in the thin sun... think of some new ways to see and explore your world.

And to finish, a small poem...

Arctic maid  
Snow descending  
Twist your braid  
Connect the new lands  
Trek the brightness  
Darkness, bending  
Bring fresh winds  
Explore with both hands



*Passion*

## Passionate Days

‘Passion is like a restless wind - that turns into freedom’ (from the song Pasion – Sarah Brightman)

When I hear this song, and especially when I listen to the duet with Sarah and Fernando Lima, it reminds me how every creative process begins and ends with passion.

The universe continues to expand with passionate explosions, we are born out of a passionate embrace, we are passionately missed when we say our final goodbyes, and in between, passion runs through us all ‘like a restless wind’.

A writer’s words are born out of a passion to get something onto the page, a passion for the characters and the story or message that we must give birth to... but it is here I digress and prefer to put our daily passions under the microscope.

Walk with me quietly through the day of a passionate writer – it might go something like this!

### **Waking**

The thin line between dreaming and waking vibrates like a violin string - the mind’s light comes out from the shadows and illuminates the waking world.

The characters from dreamland yawn and take themselves to bed - the real stretch and head towards the waft of toast and the jarring of coffee.

### **Early Morning**

The kitchen window frames the autumnal mist of centuries, and a blue-tipped bird enters the peripheral world...the writer’s world - where feathers are made of tiny black diamonds and birds breath exhales the vocabulary of old souls.

The morning walk is taken by three friends - master and hounds. The trek gets harder – slower; they look to each other for reassurance. Yes, this is the path! This is the one! Wild eyes flashing, spit mingling with the soft melting dew - they have reached the summit - this task completes them. Their sore limbs and paws await their washing.

## **Breaking**

The mindfulness of the midday meal; - the wanting of sustenance in varying degrees by the household - the chink of glass, the light reflecting on silver. Fruit and cheese and bread broken apart; and shared with greedy fingers - dogs waiting patiently at table.

And all the time ... The writer noticing, absorbing, rearranging facts and fractals, and listening to the tunes played by vague delight and burgeoning frustration

## **Working**

The tickling clouds pass above, as the writer turns to her work. The crows mock in the chat-chat woods, and the room warms as her heart begins to tell its story - now is the time to dig in - to take the muse' offering and mould it into the world's words; to remove the veil for others to see.

By soft afternoon the writer's eyes drop from the page - she is in need of energy and takes her camera out to the world. Some pass her on the street as grotesques, queer in their own skin; others with unrealised beauty sitting just below the surface. She sketches them all in her mind's eye and stops to take a picture of a reclining rose.

## **Light Fading**

Evening is now dropping its filmy curtain, and nothing seems clear - all is betwixt and between. It's time for small drugs and medicants to match the day's trials. All the day's stories will be revealed by loved ones. In their own words ...memory bends and takes its place at the table.

The writer's mind is now full. She can take no more in - only breathe out her life...create the language that will take her and the others home.

## **Night**

Night comes terrifying, screaming its warnings to heed the path - distraction won't be tolerated on this night's journey.

'Keep up - keep up - no, no that's the wrong way - follow me - why can't you just follow me and be done?'

The sleepy dreamer writes her dreams on the blackboard of night, and she can hear a small swooshing noise as the moon washes down the stars, ready for her to read by - this noise can barely be heard but the dreamer knows its name - passion.



*Fear*

## Jumping into the Fear Stream

Many writers are encouraged to use a stream of consciousness device in order to write without overthinking, and to help them uncover words without censoring themselves.

The term 'Stream of Consciousness' was coined by philosopher and psychologist William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890)

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself as chopped up in bits ... it is nothing joined; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let's call it the stream of thought, consciousness, or subjective life

I thought I'd try this with the word FEAR and see what happens – Here are the results. (note I have added some punctuation, post-rambling, so it's easier on you, the reader)

Each of the 15 words can be used in this way and may just be the jumping off point for your greatest work!

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Fear is a flavour, a bitter bouquet, a stumble over yourself when yourself hasn't quite finished getting dressed.

Fear is a hole that has the ability to pulsate; we're taught holes are empty, but they are not.

My deepest fear is that the things I feel and connect to aren't there at all.

My deepest fear is that they are.

Either way I'm screwed for this life but I'm not sure fear cares or that I do either.

I died to my fear some time ago and a new universe popped open – a strange universe but stranger still; one that is filled with beauty and wonder and things not of this world.

So now as a writer I find fear 'in absentia', her crimes not yet punished - but fear lurks – I know she's waiting for me and is putting little dishes in front of me for me to try.

For starters perhaps - The death of a loved one.

Main course – Disease and discomfort.

Desert – What about the never-knowing of so many things, of being a mother, of being a playboy bunny, or a nun, or of being a success – whatever that means.



She's calling last drinks now –she suggests – ‘the harrowing absence of paper or something to write on, or blindness perhaps’ – that would be her grand finale – taking me down with nowhere to go, or rather nowhere to see.

But still – these are just life things – and we get on with, and get over, life things.

Fear is not being able to scribe my last words in the dust, or in blood – that would be nice – somewhere unexpected – a cave in Italy somewhere or laying down in a field with corn ears spelling out my last words.

Fear is breathing down my neck, but she won't get me.

She's breathing down yours as well, but in the end she is just a line and you have to jump, skip or hop over her and stand your ground – the ground will shift but it's yours for the shifting – ask her to move over, tell her to shove off – after all she is also afraid of you and your words.



*Moxie*

## Unacceptable! Or You Got Moxie?

What is this word, Moxie? Such a strange word...

In London when a Canadian woman opened a Moxie club; no-one came. When she opened a women's business club many people came. And so, I've discovered -

{1} Moxie originated as a patent medicine called "Moxie Nerve Food, which was created around 1876 by Dr. Augustin Thompson in Lowell, Massachusetts. Thompson claimed that it contained an extract from a rare, unnamed South American plant.

Moxie, he claimed, was especially effective against "paralysis, softening of the brain, nervousness, and insomnia."

Through extensive advertising, the neologism "moxie" has entered popular American usage with the meaning "courage, daring, or spirit, as in "This guy's got moxie!"

So, when I think about courage, or being daring or stopping the 'softening of the brain', moxie spirits me away to the 1920's – to the suffragettes, to the flapper girls – to the women who 'flaunted their disdain for what was then considered acceptable behaviour'.

This new woman used her dress code and behaviour to mould a path for women of the future. A leaping off; no going back.

If you are a writer, chances are that you will be leaping off - you will have something to say that you think 'other people' will think of as unacceptable. Writers, by definition (if they are worth their salt) should be discussing the unacceptable.

So, I'd like to share something I once wrote that an editor told me was 'unacceptable'...  
What do you think?

Ode to lost souls

I didn't know it at the time, but the best years had already passed. They were grid-locked in my memory. They belonged to me and no-one else, from another time. I had tried to no avail, to re-create some of their magic and innocence throughout my life.

I finally decided that in my decline, a stubbornness to be myself would be my substitute for happiness - it would make the present more real, more tangible, deeper.

Only my memories and dreams shone; jewel-like in the pit of my mind. All waking hours were dull and repetitious. I longed for sleep and the ability to let my mind wander through its strange labyrinths, turning corners where worlds and long-ago's, were left for dead.

Spider Beauty...One night I dreamt that I lived a day in the life of a deranged mind, a mind full of strange longings and confusion. A mind that was, as if looking through a net, only

partly clear; partly lit. I managed to communicate to other strange minds, and they visited me with cakes made of their own destruction and desolation.

The house I lived in was normal in every way, except under its guilty facade lay a mouldering mist. It got into everything and contaminated everyone who passed by.

And that was it; the moment when I realised and understood the physical, tactile nature of emotional sickness, feelings purged, changed, mutated in a blinding single moment. Nothing ever the same again. The mind's perception tracing new circuits through the brain like hot solder; burning and etching new feelings to be remembered and acted upon.

I felt the weight of humans perishing.

Burned out, forever gone to dust, the wind unwinding in absolute silence and darkness?

And one question remained inside this mind - Where was the map for the dark souls who didn't know where love lived? Which path could they follow to become humanely beautiful?

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What have I learned from all this? - that sometimes when we struggle with a piece of writing we don't start from darkness, it brings us to darkness, and our first instinct is to recoil, to run from something that repels us, something that we think doesn't reflect who we believe ourselves to be.

But it's having the balls or the moxie to see where it takes us, that informs all of our writing; makes us more compassionate writers to our readers and allows the muse or the mind's eye to write what it needs to, instead of our logical brain trying to construct sentences.

Which leads me to the most difficult part of being a writer - not censoring ourselves!

{1} Reference Wikipedia



*Bravery*

## Only the Brave

Sometimes we hear stories of incredible bravery.

- The man jumping into a raging river to save his dog.
- The woman who puts herself in danger to save her child.
- The patient waiting for major surgery or treatment - not knowing the outcome, again...

But as a writer, we don't have to act in a moment of panic or without thinking - we have the luxury of time and choice, as to whether we are brave on the page (or not).

My own bravery list or I should say *test*, goes something like this:

Crossing a word out because I think people will react badly or judge me in a way I don't want to be perceived – and then uncrossing it and putting it back in (small brave).

Shying away from concepts because my 'blinkers' are well and truly working that day – thinking only I would understand a particular concept – that the readers won't get it - and then trusting that we all share our humanity and the muse will be sorely pissed at my arrogance – See note 1 – go back and try again (slightly bigger brave).

Allowing anti-flow to enter the room – this takes all sorts of guises – second guessing every word, allowing distractions to break in, not setting the room up for bravery in the first place (common sense).

Patting the dog – looking at her for inspiration – writing down what she's thinking ☺ (soulfully brave).

Looking at my bookshelf and seeing my heroes/heroines – Plath, Murdoch, Nin, Hughes, Jung, Tolle, Drabble, Kundera, Rumi – who am I to think I have a right to the page!

See note 1 – go back and try again (depressingly brave).

Killing my darlings (heroic!)

Allowing the writing to show up the way IT wants to (the only worthwhile type of brave).

So, writers, get your pens out! Look at your own list and ask yourself how brave am I with my writing and how much room is there to grow?



*Integrity*

## Who Owns What and Who Cares?

All writers, artists, photographers, thinkers, inventors, and creatives are faced with the same problem... at what point in the process does someone 'own' something.

Copyright goes some way to alleviating the stress of being copied but you can't stop someone else on the planet coming up with the same idea, at the same time. And what of all the creatives who are basing their ideas on the ancients or others who have come before them, albeit with a new twist or a new way of representing those same ideas.

When I think of integrity in this space and the exponentially increasing narcissism that comes along with our social media worlds (and the fact that everyone can now be their own PR machine) I admit, I'm in need of a magnifying glass to find examples of good, old-fashioned human integrity.

The only advice I can proffer is – if you think you shouldn't use something, then don't. As well as being a writer, I'm also an avid photographer and spend many hours carefully editing my images and thinking of captions to go with them. When I see others use these without even a simple credit my heart sinks – but to counteract this I have now made a promise to the universe that I will take even more photos. I won't bother with watermarks or claims of ownership but will simply put them out there for all to share and hopefully enjoy. I guess in the end I may own the camera, but I don't own the thing that I'm photographing, well unless it's my dog, or my house, or my stuff – you get the picture (and existentially do I really own those?)

I believe integrity is really all about your inner guidance system. Not only is it about your values and treating your fellow creatives with integrity but also treating the work with integrity. For me, it all comes back to the muse or the creative source that gives us our urge and intent to work and write. It's this power that I revere most and try to make integral to any writing or creative endeavour.

I also think integrity includes paying it forward and helping grow the talents of others, regardless of what stage we are at on our own journey. We can always find a way to stay true to ourselves and others, as our stories emerge and are shared.



## The End

So, we have come to the end of our experiment. This work has been such an emotionally rewarding experience for us all and we believe it has helped us take our own writing to the next level.

We also hope you have enjoyed our small token to support YOU as an emerging writer – or an already published one!

Using a particular word to kick start this deep dive into our own creativity has worked well for us and we hope you find a way of using it too, either within your own writing groups or by yourself if that works for you.

## Final Thanks

My eternal gratitude to the women who accompanied me on this journey – I learnt so much from them and wish them every success in the future.