

MY EPIPHANY OF WRITING

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Ahmed explores the lessons he has learned that have helped him to understand himself as a “writer.”

I revised the sentence for the tenth time and read it aloud, but it didn't sound quite right. I crumpled the paper and tossed it in the half full garbage bin nearby. It landed softly on the pile of already smashed papers that contained the nearly polished opening of a short story. I switched strategies and focused on the ending first, backtracking my way towards the beginning. Again, after a few more attempts, I hit a writer's block. SO, I took a break, closed my eyes, and began meditating. I pictured my mentor: a gray-haired lady, with kind eyes behind thin spectacles, and an understanding smile. Then, I repeated my mantra – I can be a writer too.

This meditation calms me for two reasons. One, it helps me channel my creativity. Two, I know the obstacles are inevitable because I have just started writing.

I grew up believing writing was an inborn talent and I did not possess it.

During my childhood, I would read children's stories and believe writers were led by a divine guidance. After a while, I practiced writing short stories in Urdu, but every time I read something written by professionals, I knew with conviction that my stories lacked something important, some necessary ingredients.

Time moved on and I fell into the normal habits of growing up. I attended school to further my education but I stopped writing stories. By the time I was twenty, the desire to write stories had become a distant memory.

At last, when my false belief was shattered, I understood that a human brain holds mysteries that can sometimes redefine people's destinies. Soon the long forgotten writing memories retraced their baby pathways in my brain, and I realized that all my life I was nurturing a sacred desire to write, but I had discovered it later on in my existence.

That is to say, on a summer morning in 2013, I was sitting in a small room with a professor: my mentor. Outside birds were chirping in the yard. Through the opened window, A gentle breeze lightly blew my professor's gray hair. A moment later, she tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear and said, “Pick one of the stories from this magazine and rewrite it in your own words.”

She extended the *New Yorker* magazine in her hand and I accepted it. Still not sure what she meant, I looked at her with a questioning gaze.

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She smiled and said, “Just paraphrase the story. That is all.”

In a reluctant voice, I responded, “Okay, I will.” Leafing through the magazine, I stopped at the article about the extinction of passenger pigeons in America during the early nineteenth-century. “Maybe this one?” I asked.

Again, she smiled and instructed, “That’s fine. Now, once you’ve finished writing the first draft, revise it at least four more times. Then, I want you to bring me the last two drafts to look at.”

I gaped.

“Is it too much writing for you?” she inquired, studying my body language.

“No, professor ... I don’t get it. I am confused about revise and rewrite.

She looked me in the eyes and in a calm voice explained, “It takes at least eight to nine drafts before something emerges or develops on a piece of paper.”

As my childhood memories rushed through my mind, I recalled writing to be an inborn talent blessed by a divine guidance. I proposed, “That’s cheating.”

The look on her face reached the edge of laughter, suggesting if I laughed she would too. I repeated my comment and laughed.

She joined in with my laughter.

For the next few minutes, we entered into a lengthy discussion about writing. The more I heard her say “revision, revision, and revision,” the more I thought cheating, cheating, and cheating. Maintaining my false belief, I argued that I lacked the divine gift to write. Yet, she assured me that writing is an acquired skill, and it can be learned with vigorous practice. A revision or rewritten draft is an extended process to effective writing. And almost every writer, even the most famous ones, utilize this procedure.

Gradually, her comments, seasoned with reasoning, began to settle in my mind, but I still asked, “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” she assured me.

Nevertheless, I was experiencing conflicted emotions. However, she was providing me hope to become a writer. I felt happy because it was my wish to write short stories. But, I felt sad as well. I realized that I squandered precious years of my life believing I was born without such talent. Had I known writing was an acquired skill, I would have learned it long ago.

After a moment, I said, “Then, I could be a writer too.”

I smiled as I caught the laughter in her intelligent eyes.

At last, I wrote a short story, revised it, rewrote it, and then revised it again. Finally, I shared it with my professor and received constructive criticism. I cried! So, I wrote another short story and again showed it to her.

Slowly, I began to understand nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions. Then, I practiced composing complete short sentences. I imitated Ernest Hemingway. I selected his short story “Hills Like White Elephants” and created my own peculiar conflict.

Again, I cried.

Then, I felt better.

And finally, I laughed.

It’s been almost five years since I found my true potential – a writer. And every time I hit a writer’s block, I meditate. And then, when I meditate, I picture my mentor

– a gray-haired lady, with kind eyes behind thin spectacles, and an understanding smile. She is my anchor and reason behind my creativity. Then, as I repeat my mantra, I can be a writer too, I feel my writing rhythm surfacing. Finally, I feel confident and then find a way to complete my next assignment.

Either I had been born with a natural talent to write and did not know it or I have been acquiring it through my writing experiences. Regardless of how I have been achieving it, I do know whenever I lack internal guidance, I write meaningless stories.