

I QUIT AND OTHER SENSIBLE IDEAS...

Or

Convincing Yourself You're Not Crazy

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It comes along more frequently than not: The thought that you're insane and should pursue a career that doesn't stomp on your pride or demolish your ego. You have the hopes of fame and fortune to comfort you at times, but not often enough to keep doubt from gnawing at your mind.

Discouragement is a constant companion. You face rejections. You spend time, money and energy with no guarantee of financial gain (and if you're published, you face rejections; spend time, money and energy with no guarantee of financial gain). You endure looks of healthy disdain from people when you reveal you're a writer. If you're a literary writer, you're regarded with some awe; a genre author; however, is looked upon with the same reverence as a stripper.

At times like these, quitting seems like a sensible thing to do. I would encourage it, if you are constantly depressed and on the verge of madness. It isn't worth your sanity and publishing isn't an industry that is concerned with keeping you sane. Drinking may no longer be common, but it certainly is a temptation.

If rejections make you want to bang your head against the wall, writing is painful and the thought of another damn story swimming in your head makes you nauseous. Stop. Now. If you can't stop, there's help.

Here are five reasons to stay a writer:

You don't have to submit your work. There's no obligation for a writer to share their work with editors and critics (Emily Dickinson is a fine example) you can write for the pleasure of it. If you do wish to publicize your work, you can self-publish. However, you don't need to be published to be a writer (I know I keep saying this, but I will continue to do so until I am believed). Validation is great, creation divine. Create, explore, indulge! Be free. Write.

For immortality. When you die, there is a distinct possibility that your unpublished works will be discovered, you'll be proclaimed a genius, your books will be translated into many languages both live and dead, turned into a film every few decades and inspire legions of writers who are obscure and writing anyway. If you don't write, there will be nothing to discover.

Revenge. Remember that teacher who bloodied your beloved essays with red marks? That scathing critique partner with 'helpful advice'? That insolent editor who didn't even bother to send a form rejection, but scribbled 'No thanks' on your query? Well, write to show the bastards! Strong emotions are a great motivation to write. Write to prove them wrong.

We need stories. Naturally, literary snobs would beg to differ thinking literature is being polluted by uneducated neophytes who have the audacity to write because they have the ability to type their names.

Fortunately, I find their opinions as necessary as Athletes' foot. Therefore, I implore you to tell your tales in your voice. No copycats please. It doesn't matter if your prose doesn't ring like Jane Austen, echo like J. California Cooper, bellow like Mark Twain, sing like JK Rowling's or linger like Anne Lamott's. We need stories to survive. Help us.

You get to determine your success. Writing can afford you big and little successes. The poem that brought a smile to your friend's face, the essay that saved the front page of the neighborhood newsletter, the short story that helped a lonely teenager through a hard time, the novel that opened someone's mind to a new way of thinking.

Okay, so you may never hit the bestseller's list, win a National Book Award or any award for that matter. Perhaps only the sky will know your gifts. You're living a dream few people allow themselves to experience. They talk about writing--some very loudly--but few do it. The world bends to those who proclaim who they are without apology (okay it doesn't actually bend, but it does bow a little).

Because you must. That's reason enough for me. I don't have a style or voice that many know and my work isn't breaking any records. There are times I want to throw up my hands and say, "Enough! I quit!" And the world sighs with relief and I sigh feeling in control of my future. I stand up from my desk determined never to return. Then a little voice says... "There was this woman who discovered she was married to the wrong man..."

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