

The Audacity to Write a Great Story

February 10, 2022

joani elliot



“It is a silver morning like any other. I am at my desk. Then the phone rings, or someone raps at the door. I am deep in the machinery of my wits. Reluctantly I rise, I answer the phone or I open the door. And the thought which I had in hand, or almost in hand, is gone. Creative work needs solitude. It needs concentration, without interruptions. It needs the whole sky to fly in, and no eye watching until it comes to that certainty which it aspires to, but does not necessarily have at once. Privacy, then. A place apart — to pace, to chew pencils, to scribble and erase and scribble again.

“But just as often, if not more often, the interruption comes not from another but from the self itself, or some other self within the self, that whistles and pounds upon the door panels and tosses itself, splashing, into the pond of meditation. And what does it have to say? That you must phone the dentist, that you are out of mustard, that your uncle Stanley’s birthday is two weeks hence. You react, of course. Then you return to your work, only to find that the imps of idea have fled back into the mist.”

Mary Oliver from *Upstream*





“It is six A.M., and I am working. I am absentminded, reckless, heedless of social obligations, etc. It is as it must be. The tire goes flat, the tooth falls out, there will be a hundred meals without mustard. The poem gets written. I have wrestled with the angel and I am stained with light and I have no shame. Neither do I have guilt. My responsibility is not to the ordinary, or the timely. It does not include mustard, or teeth. It does not extend to the lost button, or the beans in the pot. My loyalty is to the inner vision, whenever and howsoever it may arrive. If I have a meeting with you at three o’clock, rejoice if I am late. Rejoice even more if I do not arrive at all.

“There is no other way work of artistic worth can be done. And the occasional success, to the striver, is worth everything. The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time.”

Mary Oliver from *Upstream*



“The most important thing about art is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down every day and trying.”

Steven Pressfield



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Writing Workshop: February 20, 2022
Resource Guide

Famous Writers and Their Routines:

<https://prowritingaid.com/writing-routines-famous-authors>

<https://jamesclear.com/daily-routines-writers>

<https://medium.com/the-mission/the-daily-routine-of-20-famous-writers-and-how-you-can-use-them-to-succeed-1603f52fbb77>

Books and other Resources mentioned:

Upstream: Selected Essays, by Mary Oliver

Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise, by Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool

Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones, by James Clear

The War of Art, by Steven Pressfield

Big Magic, by Elizabeth Gilbert

Brene Brown, "Unlocking Us" Interview Parts I&II with James Clear, Spotify

For links to my favorite books on writing visit the Writing section on my website.

Quotes from Joani's Workshop:

"You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment." Annie Dillard

"The most important thing about art is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down every day and trying." Steven Pressfield

"Love words, agonize over sentences. And pay attention to the world." Susan Sontag

"Writing is something you do alone. It's a profession for introverts who want to tell you a story but don't want to make eye contact while doing it." John Green

"Put your ass where your heart wants to be." Steven Pressfield

"Resistance is experienced as fear; the degree of fear equates to the strength of Resistance. Therefore, the more fear we feel about a specific enterprise, the more certain we can be that that enterprise is important to us and to the growth of our soul. That's why we feel so much Resistance. If it meant nothing to us, there'd be no Resistance." Steven Pressfield

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“I’ve found that goals are good for planning your progress and systems are good for actually making progress.” James Clear
<https://jamesclear.com/daily-routines-writers>

“You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, nonapologetically, to say “no” to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger “yes” burning inside. The enemy of the “best” is often the “good.” Stephen Covey

“Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become. No single instance will transform your beliefs, but as the votes build up, so does the evidence of your new identity.”
James Clear

“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.”
James Clear

“My abandoned dreams were making a racket in my soul.”
Joy Harjo

Writer Affirmation Statement:

The magic pixie dust that affects every single bit of writing.

- I am a writer and what I am doing matters, even if it's only important to me right now.
- The time that I am spending to write is time well spent. It's valuable.
- I deserve to have creative space in my life. Why? Because I am a human being and I desire to have creative space.
- I am worthy of the time I spend to express the creative parts of myself that are making a "racket in my soul."
- Creative space is not just reserved for the select few.
- I view creative living as our birthright. I believe living a creative life helps us to feel more alive, more whole, more invigorated. A creative life helps us live in alignment with the truest versions of ourselves.

For more writing quotes, resources and writing book recommendations visit: joanielliott.com/writing