

GIRL AT PLAY

SHE'S BUSINESS. SHE'S CREATIVE. SHE'S BONAFIDE!

Interview with Be Real Magazine, June 2002 *Growing into my own*

It's time to weed out my book collection, which has grown by leaps and bounds this past year. It's time to choose which books I want to keep and which ones will be sold to the second-hand bookstore down the street. Most of the books I decided to sell were the ones that were so crucial and biblical to me last year when I left the corporate world to become a freelance writer. They are the books on how to write.

When I first began to write for a living, I wasn't sure which to take to be a writer, sell my work, and make money. I believed there had to be a right way to write and a wrong way to write just like in my corporate days when there were certain times I showed up to work, certain times I took lunch, specific ways to write reports, and specific ways to take notes.

At first, I needed direction, badly. I was certain that I didn't know the right way to go about "being a writer." I was so insecure and needed reassurance that I looked to experienced writers to tell me how to successfully be a writer. And so, my trips to bookstores became less for pleasure and more for work. I became obsessed with biographies, how to's and self help books on writing. I dug endlessly around bookstore shelves for answers.

One of the first books I read on writing was Julia Cameron's The Artist Way. In her book, she suggested writing three pages about anything on large blank sheets of paper each morning. Her idea was planted into my brain as a surefire way to help me grow as a writer and so each morning I began to write my "morning pages." I was a dedicated morning page writer for two days until I failed because trying to write three blank pages at 8am did not work for me.

When I heard a famous writer declare that she broke for tea at 9am every morning, so did I, even though I much preferred a cup at 3pm.

After hearing the success of first time author J.K. Rowling, I immediately researched how she wrote I found that she kept notes in several large blank books at a time. I bought a dozen. She also mentioned how she wrote almost every page of her novels in a café. I had to try this also, despite the fact I know I write better in solitude. I was afraid my writing wouldn't be as good as hers if I couldn't hack the romance of writing in a cafe.

Any author who gave advice on writing, I would take it. I thought if they were able to write a book about it, they *had* to know how to do it the right way, and the only way I could be a writer was if I wrote just like them. Instead of trying to find my own voice, I listened to those of others, which made me feel less like a writer and more of copycat.

I couldn't write with glitter pens, I couldn't write in bed, I couldn't write in cafés and I couldn't write three large pages about nothing every day. I began to feel like a failure because none of the methods of published writers fit me.

After eight months of little writing and lots of frustration I threw my hands in the air and tossed all the books to the back of the closet and gave up on trying to fit some image that I felt I couldn't be.

When I did that, a strange thing happened. I started to find a process that fit me - my own.

I wrote as I needed to - in front of a computer screen, in silence with a small budding idea in my mind. I would begin to type out my thoughts out and nurture them along until they grew into words that would become an article. Then I would submit the article to magazines and to my surprise, some of my articles were accepted for publication.

By simply writing as I needed to, doing what works for me, and seeing results from doing that, I was able to stop feeling as though I was doing it all wrong, but in fact, doing something right.

The more I worked, the more comfortable I became with how I worked. And slowly I realised that the simplest, easiest way to "officially" be a writer was just to write.

Despite the fact I had been brave enough last April to declare myself a writer and leave my corporate job to pursue writing full time, I had been so insecure in the beginning that I

forgot to trust myself enough to know how to write. The schedule I currently keep isn't found in any book. I start around 8am and finish up around 4pm. I break for tea at 3 o'clock without fail, and I actually take weekends off. I scribble haphazardly in fifteen million different notebooks - some blank, some with lines, some cheap, and some coloured marvellously. I don't do morning pages and I stay out of cafés except for late night dates with my husband.

So now, the books that were so vital to me in the beginning will be finding a new home this weekend. They weren't all bad, but I know it's best for me to use these books for ideas, but not as gospel. Because the answers I seek, the reassurance I need, and bravery I crave will never be completely found in someone else's book. Only mine.