Op/Ed

"So ya wanna be a writer..."

Famous Writers School of Hard Knocks
No. 32 Lexicon Ave.
Somewhere-in-America, U.S.A.

to the prospective writer/author on the hardships of a life in the world of imaginative enlightenment through

Sweet Aspiring Author,

So you think you want to be a writer! If so, you have chosen a field of endeavor quite unlike any other and yet very similar to many jobs in life. Confused? If so, get used to it. You'll then be well on the road to becoming a writer.

In this letter, the first in a series of coming communiques prompted by your initial query to us at the school some weeks ago, we will attempt to delve into some aspects of your life as a writer. If indeed you find it's the life you choose to lead.

But beware.

The writer's life is not an easy lot. There are great demands placed on you as a communicator of creative thought or journalistic expertise or whatever your specific case may be. Nevertheless, the writer must be undaunted and unswerving in his own personal search for, shall we say, his individual holy grail.

Subsequent letters will venture into more specific areas of writing but this first is to be a primer. It's goal is to introduce you, upfront, to the pitfalls you will likely stumble upon in your quest for the literary limelight.

Therefore, as what we hope to be a service to our prospective students, we humbly offer a partial listing of some of the distractions you will happen into as you strive to commit your respective genius to paper. Sort of a laundry list of things that get in a writer's way when he's trying to write.

The following numbered sections are some distinct examples of deterrence to your ascribed goal to be a scribe. We like to call them the little gremlin-things that nibble (and sometimes gobble) away at the precious few chunks of time you store in your lexicographic larder to call your own, in which to do the thing you firmly want to do and enable you to call yourself that which you so fervently desire to be... A WRITER!

1. Your life. Generally, you will find, as a writer, that the day-to-day drudgery of living your life will put you at a great inconvenience. It will sap most of your time, consuming it on various sundry, petty things that have no place at all in a writers life. It would be so much more profitable if one could pay another to live out the daily routine. A fee for feeding the children to school, another for paying the bills, still another for making love to the wife (or husband, as the case may be)...and perhaps even a fee for working to support you while you're still only a budding talent and not yet a luminary in publishing heaven. All this would serve to greater free you from your burdens and allow you to pursue the muse.

Alas, such is not the case.

So furthermore, we will alert you to some especially sore spots you're liable to confront in your life and occasionally offer a word of caution or advice.

2. Little fix it jobs around the house prey mercilessly on time. That screen door you've been meaning to fix for so long should not be fixed before sitting down to revise that first draft.

Whereas one little fix-it job takes only five minutes, these tasks breed faster than rabbits and soon you'll be doing 13 of them, which cost you just over a hour, not counting the time to rest and think up new ones after finishing the current one, thereby blowing your whole morning.

Two good rules of thumb are: it isn't fallen down around you by now, it never will. Or: if in doubt, let it rot.

3. Beware getting into the refrigerator for a snack or a cold drink. Many a would-be writer has entered the box only to spend an hour cleaning it out and scrubbing it down. This makes for poor quantities of copy but it is helpful in a job in hotel-motel management or kitchen/restaurant work, which are jobs failed or failing writers often aspire to next.

4. When sitting down at the typewriter, don't study the E.A. and O keys too carefully. They tend to become plugged with grit easily and this leads to cleaning the keys, an arduous tedious and filthy task sure to waste valuable writing time.

5. Don't-repeat don't hang signs on the door to your den saying, "Do Not Disturb Writer at Work." The sounds of snickers, mild laughter and guttus outside the door is not conducive to your labors.

6. Stay off the phone! So much time is wasted on idle conversations with your mother, sister, old friend, new girlfriend, mistress, time and temperature recordings, operatic and drama announcements, the best advice here is to rip the bloody thing out of the wall and chuck it out the door.

7. If you're really serious about writing, that is. (And can afford the enormous reinstallation charge.)

8. If you have children, send them to school. Any school. At any age. Or better still, refrain from having children, if possible.

9. Try to schedule writing time when you're alone and then adhere to it. Put pad and pencil in the bathroom and take advantage of that wasted time spent sitting, reading the joke book attached to the wall with a chain for the party guests. (And be sure to use the proper paper when it's time to depart. Let your critic make those decisions for you. Write a lot, but don't write.)

10. Be responsive to your muse. It strikes without schedule. Creativity is fickle and elusive in nature and must be attended to like a demanding lover.

Always keep pad and pencil handy for those flashes of brilliance that crop up at the oddest and often most in opportune times. But always be responsive to them immediately. (Besides, if your wife or husband really loves and understands you, they'll wait. Or they'll roll over and try again tomorrow night.)

11. And while we're on the fickle muse, it would be wise to mention the theory so often profusely subscribed to known as the 'Island of Serenity in a Sea of Noise.' Plainly, your discipline as a writer must be such that you can write anytime, anywhere. On a crowded bus, you must write on the shopping bag the short, fat lady standing in front you keeps shoving in your face.

As the spirit moves, so too should ingenuity overcome adversity.

All the above disruptions (there are many more but you get the idea now) are quite commonplace outside the literary life itself, too. It is found that most common folk (non-writers as opposed to we enlightened) find dalliance in and are plagued by much or all of the aforementioned afflications while letter-writing, check-balancing, or budget, menu or diet planning.

And even teachers, while making up tests or grading papers, are stricken.

In truth, anyone who has had to write the finest paragraph or most tedious thesis paper knows of the illusory illustrated above.

But the writer, ah yes, being who he hopes to be, must elevate himself above the baser man, must transcend the tribulations to heed the beckoning call, must harken to the necromantic nirvana known as "AUTHORSHIP" with a zealously beyond mortal ken and a dedication to writing even beyond the grave.

In short, a writer must give his all, at the sacrifice of almost everything else, to obtain the intimate, nay carnal, embrace of his Illusive lover, his dream and his glory; his work.

Such is the pattern to which he is fated, and such is the cloth he need be cut from.

And too few are the bolts on the rack.

Now, for those few of you still left who really want to write...