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INTRODUCTION



Writing Saved My Life

Writing saved my life. Before I found writing I had exhausted all the other ways of being in the world that I knew about. But, as with anything that one makes entirely one's own, I had to reinvent writing. I had to unravel everything I had been taught and wind it back up again, *my way*.

Before I found writing, I longed for writing. In my earliest memory I am four and frustrated with my inability to have my words all gathered together on a piece of paper. Over the years frustration endlessly reinvented itself.

One version took the form of not writing. What can I write about? I'd think. Inflect this sentence four ways and you have the whole story. *What* can I write about? I have no subject. *Can?* I have no skill. *I?* Insignificant me? *Write about* implies savoring, high-

lighting, treasuring some aspect of my experience. But my experiences seemed small.

Another version was a disconcerting sense of being peripheral to my life. The activity that belonged to me (I felt sure) was writing but I couldn't find a way "in" to writing. I developed an intense nostalgia as if a precious possession (so familiar) was being mysteriously withheld from me.

The solution came via haiku (short unrhymed Japanese poems capturing the essence of a moment). For several years I wrote one haiku a day and then spent hours polishing those I had written on previous days. This tiny step proved increasingly satisfying.

Gradually it dawned on me that the healing factor was not the haiku but the "one per day." Without even knowing it, I had developed a "practice." Everyday, no matter what, I wrote one haiku. In my mind I became the person who writes "a haiku a day." That was the beginning of knowing who I was.

When my haiku-writing "period" turned into a generic "writing period," I was launched. The focus was on attendance—being present for writing. It really didn't matter *what* I wrote during that time.

Writing comes like an urge or a pulse, not to say something, but to be with words as they arise and

then to shape them or craft them. The words could be wood. It makes no difference.

One beats through me, pushes its way to the forefront and appears on a page. I care about this. I care about the clarity of myself as a vessel, the utensils used, the paper as receptor and the way the whole process unfolds. Silence for me is replete with possibility.

Just at dusk I seat myself cross-legged in my wooden chair. Before me placemat-like is a square Japanese cloth upon which rests a quilted box holding all my writing utensils. I position my notebook on the cloth beside my skinny blue mechanical pencil and stick eraser. The pink eraser tip just emerges from its clear plastic sheath, oddly phallic.

I am surrounded by flat bare surfaces. I am straight-backed, warm, well-supported. I close my eyes and begin with a prayer. I relax into the luxury of here, the richness of the space, the soft light, the pure quiet.

My consciousness spins toward a vortex in the center of which is a word. It is mine and I write it down. I am steady, unperturbed. I have no feeling outside of this steadiness, a taut yet receptive state of being awake. Listening for the sound of a word I am totally still except for the slight motion of my hand guiding the pencil.