

Perfectly Flawed: A Writer's Perspective

When I was about nine years old, my older brother Nick came home from a school library trip with a book called *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day*. Back then, he wasn't the reading type, so he tossed the book aside and returned to his normal pre-teen life. I picked up the pink book with the funny title, while taking note of the author's name, "Nikki Giovanni" and flipped through it.

I saw cussing, and I was hooked.

I'd never seen profanity in print. Besides, there was something about her gentle, careful placement of words, and the brash way in which she expressed herself that made me feel less weird. I was an awkward child, and I felt like the woman who wrote this book "got me".

I started writing my own poetry. They were happy, rhyming poems at first. Then I tried writing stories with my poetry, which I would later learn were called 'narrative poems'. Eventually, when I was about twelve all of my poems became about death. I lost my grandmother, an aunt, and a few others in the same time period; so I'm sure my parents were grateful I had an outlet, although it was morbid. In high school I wrote "secret poems" to my crushes. I even used my poetry skills to fool the guys in my high school into thinking I could freestyle. Although I was super shy, I would remember my lines and defeat them in freestyle battles during lunch.

On the other hand, stories, even short ones, were intimidating. I don't even remember the first time I really took a crack at it, or why. But eventually I just started writing all types of stories-from a gay Jewish college student falling for his Black professor, to a fed up mother killing her children. Some of them sucked, but it didn't matter to me. My goal was just to practice.

I learned a while ago, that my writing reflects my life. Sometimes it's delicious and I can't get enough, and sometimes it's just bland. Sometimes it comes natural, and other times it seems as unnatural as a man going into labour.

As a woman, I don't fret about being perfect-bushy brows; unruly hair. I have many flaws, and so does my writing. As much as I take steps to improve my writing, I try not to stress about it. I understand that as cliché as it may sound, writing is truly a journey. It's not a craft that is easily mastered, and that's what intrigues me.

The only time I've ever had writer's block is when I thought too much about "perfecting" my writing. It started when I met a fellow writer at a women's writing workshop in D.C. I admired her work, or at least her self-confidence as a writer and her English degree, which she boasted about. So when she asked to look at some of my work, I sent her one of my short stories and some poetry. She told me that she would not, and could not; finish reading my short story because it "didn't hold her attention". Ouch.

I wasn't new to critiques at the time and still welcome them, but this comment, along with many others that she offered over the following months were draining.

This resulted in about a four month block. Actually, I actually still wrote, but it was a stiff and unnatural. It didn't feel like the thing I loved. I was frustrated and scared of the block. Though I've had times in my life where I didn't write because I chose not to, I'd never before not been able to write. It was a scary feeling.

I figured if I couldn't write, at least I could read. I emerged myself in books. I'm talking fiction; the last thing I needed was another writing book. I have a library of them on style and function, but my right brain needed some love. Fortunately, with the help of authors like Shay Youngblood, James McBride, Donald Goines, and my favorite chick lit author Anna Maxted, my creativity drought was lifted.

Reading some of y favorite authors, allowed me to relax again, and have fun with this thing. The irony was, I later learned that the other writer had perpetual writer's block. She was super hard on herself too. She confessed that it would sometimes take her months to write one paragraph. She often spoke of hating writing. While I can sometimes relate to the feeling, she said it like she meant it, and wouldn't allow herself to just write freely. This incident spoke volumes in my life, even outside of writing.

Writing truly is a reflection of life.

We should listen to a select few for guidance, work towards improvement, not perfection, be patient, and have fun. Finding your groove with writing is a lifelong journey. But ever since I picked up that pink book with the funny name, I've been enjoying the journey-roadblocks, potholes, and all.

--Daki