

How to be an incredible writer

By Dal Kular

*Freshening up this essay from long time back, in response to recent conversations I've had with folks struggling to write or doubting in the power of their unique voice and words. Your words do matter. Your stories matter. I feel the doubts too. I get knocked back. Then I pick up my pen and write my f***ing heart out anyway. You can do it too. I believe in YOU.*

"My notebooks have always been very precious to me...they are footprints of my thoughts, tracks of journeys, curiosity-paths and desire-lines."

— Jay Griffiths

I write because the freedom of gliding my fountain pen across paper feels as good as the sea air at Criccieth which is filling my lungs up as I write this. Even when writing is hard, both physically (arthritis in my hands and fingers) and mentally I know I've done my best in that moment. I know I've created a little bit of space in my bodymindsoul. Space to be. To rest. Space for new imaginings. Words and writing – in my notebooks mostly – are a sanctuary and essential for my emotional, mental and physical survival in my little part of the universe.

I've been re-considering this over the last few months as I release the pressure, frenzy and noise of publishing a 'big book' and to be seen as a 'credible' writer. Right now, that pressure takes the joy out of writing which means I'll forgo the credibility. Stuff it. Recovering from two head injuries has meant I've had to re-assess and slow my writing aspirations considerably. Honestly, I'm relieved.

If I'm not credible because I've not been published, or not published a big book with a big publisher, or (fill in the gap) maybe that makes me an incredible writer instead?

incredible / in-kred'i-bl/ adjective 1. Unbelievable 2. Difficult to believe in 3. Very great
4. Unusually good, amazing (informal)

When the nib of my pen sings my songs real, those words feel like life ropes, pulling me back to shore tirelessly and unconditionally. Since my Dad passed in 2016, life's been intense in all the good, beautiful and wild ways and in all the ways that ache, hurt, feel endless and heart-wrenching. If I didn't have incredible words to play with I don't quite know what state my mind would be in right now.

About a year after my Dad's death, I began to feel bone-alone. I'd never experienced a loneliness so thorough and invasive. I felt as if loneliness had replaced the calcium phosphate in my bones, hardening into my skeletal frame, bending my posture like sadness does. The loneliness seemed to leach through the layers of my skin, blanketing me in an invisible fog. Nothing seemed to ease the ache. Not friends, not family, not Netflix box sets.

I recall one of the places where I felt the loneliness wash away was sea-swimming off the south coast of Crete. Salt water seemed to have the ability to penetrate my bones and pull out the lonelysts. Or sat under my favourite olive tree, an old soul overlooking the Libyan sea. We had some good chats, me and this tree. Leaning against their trunk I felt held and loved. A place where I could step out of linear time, everyday life, the endless to-do lists, reality-noise, responsibilities and dream again on sun rays and sea-gaze. Alone.

Back then in Crete, I started pouring my heart and aching bones in to my journal, without distraction. After my Dad died I wrote in white-covered journals only. At the time I didn't know why. Looking back I think the white space of the cover felt easy on my wounded psyche, felt ethereal, and possible. Where words have been my life ropes, keeping a journal has been my life belt, holding me afloat in that year of wild seas full of shipwrecks.

My journals can handle the loneliness and carry the weight of grief that spontaneously gushed out of me, the repeated swells of bone-aloneness. My journal can handle the intensity of aches, pains, grief, dreams, ideas, obsessions and secrets that would make even the most trusted friend run away very fast! It's cheaper than therapy and sometimes a much better listener.

Even so, pains spoken aloud to a trusted another is powerful. I remember the moment I told a close friend that my loneliness felt bone-deep. She heard me to her bones and that bone to bone acknowledgement helped the loneliness evaporate for a time. It still skulks back quietly and in those moments, often in the middle of the night, I reach for my life ropes – my words, my unconditional fountain pen and lined paper and scratch it all out until I feel ready to breath again.

Anyone and everyone who keeps a journal of any type is an incredible writer. A very great writer. An unusually good, amazing writer. Their unbelievable and difficult to believe in words are fully heard on the page. Because a journal-keeper dares. Dares to go in to the underworlds. Dares to defy gravity. Dares to swim in night seas. Dares to forgo credibility. Dares to write for writing's sake.