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Volumen 11 Número 2 (Diciembre 2023)

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"How I Started: It Is Right To Write"

Para citar el artículo

Sibanda, Ndaba. "How I Started: It Is Right To Write" *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 11.2 (2023):

<<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>

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How I Started: It Is Right To Write

For a writer worth his or her salt, writing is more than the stringing of a few sentences together in front of a computer or on a piece of paper. Writing is a personal process. However, more importantly, I think writing is a bundle of fire or passion one has to assuage time and again. Of course, it has its physical and mental pressures, pranks and menaces. For we are all human, at the end of the day. Being a hugely sedentary duty, after working on it for an unbroken long period of time, one's backbone could eventually "complain". This could come in the form of stiffness, itchiness or numbness. At times one might find one's eyes getting a bit irritated, or bit tearful as a result one has to strain them to concentrate on the job at hand. Yet the best and wisest thing would be to take a well-deserved break. Forcing matters is an unhealthy and unwise habit. It tends to compromise the quality of work one can produce. Health-wise, it has serious side effects.

Writing can be taken as a possessive, addictive as a wild lover. When a writer becomes as prolific as Shakespeare was, then that lover must have been a dangerously insatiable one. As a writer, are you passionate and possessive enough of your art and craft to overcome some known literary storms like a writer's block or a deluge of rejection slips or negative criticism? If you have some real drive and are loyal to your passion, you should be able to tide over. Are

you equal to the task? For this deal is real! Do you really adore your writing career to the extent that you take setbacks or rejections as opportunities for reflection and professional growth? Or you easily take such challenges as last straw- obstacles to bow to before lamely and prematurely bowing out? Are you easily swayed into submission or throwing in the pen?

I think I am really hooked on. I am helplessly enamored of this lover. We are inseparable and unstoppable. I can never ever imagine myself being cowed into submission by a rejection or a writer`s block. I cannot cringe into abandoning my craft because of a verbal or physical threat. More importantly, I cannot be coerced to ditch the pen and paper for the peace of people`s lies and expediencies. On the dance floor of life, writing is no stranger to dancing with discomfiture, at times, much to the chagrin of the guilty, the powerful and the dishonest. For it, I am prepared to put up a fight of a lifetime. Fighting the greatest fight of one`s life for one`s dignity and destiny and dreams cannot ever be in vain, but in honour.

Let me explain it this way: I hail from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe`s second largest city. I am a published poet, writer and essayist. When I was a Grade Five pupil I tried to write what was hoped to be my first little book. It is not every day that one hears of a Grade Five student who has a more or less full length script under their belt. That is no mean feat. No wonder I was a proud, jubilant and expectant Fifth Grader. Such a young author! It was, however, not to be. This was after I had possibly almost gone midway through the script that my book dream came down crushing. My parents did not mince their words in ordering me to discontinue forthwith. Obviously, I was disconcerted and demoralized. It was no mysterious why my parents were not enthusiastic about my first literary effort at writing a book. Those were days of mysterious abductions ,disappearances and murders unleashed on the unarmed, unsuspecting and innocent civilians in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces by the bigoted and bloated government of Robert Mugabe as if it floated blissfully in a bloodied and brutal vacuum bereft of morality, humanity and accountability. My handwritten script dwelt on the emotive and dangerous Entumbane Disturbances which turned out to be a perfect precursor to the Gukurahundi genocide.

Years later I was back at it, scribbling my way into a full length manuscript which I had provisionally titled *The World Is Crazy*. My childhood friend and classmate, Dumisani Philime, referred me to his typist cousin who after some bargaining on my part, accepted to type out the thick handwritten script for a fee. I neither had a typewriter nor a computer. Excitement welled up in me when I collected the completed manuscript. However, before I could collect it, she asked me the genre of that work. Was it poetry? What we innocently thought of as the highest form of literature. Was it not a personal expression and reflection of my experiences, emotions and thoughts?

How did my work sing and dance? Did the entire script sing and dance in a poetic fashion? Poetry, according Lucille Clifton is a matter of life, not just a matter of language. I paused and chuckled, before settling for "I've no idea". Indeed, I did not mean to be rude. The work was a raggle-taggle of long legends, flash and long stories, teenage philosophies, essays, jokes, riddles, views, and short poems and prose poetry. The talk of experimenting and subverting the generic boundaries was not yet the in-thing. Wrong timing! Maybe if it were now, it could have been a different story. Was the eclectic work transcendental or polemical? It sought to bring out the sublime in people by inspiring them to think and act outside the box and break

new grounds in any given field or situation. It contained some historical and artistic truths, some factual and imaginative portrayals and expressions. Life experiences have shown that at times a distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction' can be hazy or questionable. It is not always given that something that is fact is fact, and by the same token, not something that is portrayed as fact is fact. Reports tend to be neither plainly factual nor plainly fictional. For example, some people may find a certain news report as something exaggerated, unbalanced or simply full of half-truths. Maybe not too farfetched, recently, there has been a talk of alternative truth in the USA!

It was not as if I had no idea about the four main literary genres which are: poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama. I would have wanted *The World Is Crazy* to be a peculiar addition to literature. In spite of everything else, literature is supposed to transform ordinary qualities of language just like what the Russian critic Roman Jakobson, called an 'organized violence committed on ordinary speech'. Somehow, I could feel the aroma of meaning and mystery emanating from the words and the sentences I had put together. I had portrayed and painted something --had I not? Leonardo da Vinci says "Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen." After a few printed copies, I submitted the script for consideration in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, the UK and the US without success. There I was, wishing it had wings to fly all the way to the publishers who could look at it more favorably. Carl Sandburg believes "poetry is a diary kept by a sea creature who lives in land and wishes he could fly".

I became an enormous recipient of rejection slips with various tones. I no longer feared them. They reinforced my resolve to up my game. They had to find me a tough nut to crack and not drain me of enthusiasm and an undying sense of positivity and direction. I was always devising means and ways of turning them into letters of acceptance! I tried to reflect on the submissions, on the quality of my work, on the possible areas for improving, on the themes of the book. I bombarded myself with a lot of questions. For example, was it the right script but sent off to the wrong publisher? Was it really saleable and marketable or it was just a pile of paper with a directionless, tasteless and lifeless chain of words and sentences? Could it be redeemed?

Was it too lean or skeletal? Did I need to add some flesh to it? Or did I overwrite? How would I trim it and get rid of trivialities and trinkets? Who could breathe life into the script? Did I need to seek the services and opinions of other people, like editors and friends? Did I need to seek the services of a literary agent? If I were to follow that route, would I engage one who charges fees or one who did not? Was it necessary to look for an agent at that point in my writing career or was it too premature? Even with those numerous questions, I was not stuck. I saw some answers on the horizon. Hence, I kept on moving towards them, climbing up one step at a time.

It would be anachronistic for me to talk about submitting e-mail attachments of my work to different publishers because then the snail mail was the thing to do. Owing to financial constraints, in most cases, my letters or scripts were sent out as unregistered mail. Some were damaged, others got lost, and on the few occasions where I had registered mail, the postal system—after allegedly exhausting all possible means of recovering my parcels—refunded me monetarily.

Undeterred, I set out on working on a new epic poetry collection, *Love O'clock*. I fell in love with it and was in labour in a crazy and compelling fashion. Call to mind that Norman Mailer once said, "Writing books is the closest men ever come to childbearing." The pen midwifed me as I scribbled on a piece of paper on the road, on the bus, at home, at work: everywhere, during the day, during the night: any time. I wrote like a possessed individual. I was seized with writing, or rather writing had really seized me. I imbibed it now and then, and never got enough of it. I bathed in that literary intoxication. I was immersed in that writing passion. I think it was then that writing became my life, and my life became writing.

I wrote the better part of that epic poetry book, when I was a curious and serious young adult with a dream of seeing my work in print. I had a huge fascination that saw me gobble up *Pacesetter and African Writers* series. To many a newspaper editor, I wrote articles voicing my concern on brutality, oppression, company closures and relocations, marginalisation and high-level corruption. I made prose and poetry submissions to several magazines with disappointing results.

Once the script had been completed, I gave the work to some of my bookish friends for views and editing. The responses ranged from delight to positivity. It was not long before I strode into Luveve Library to rummage for information on possible publishers' physical addresses. The city council librarians were warm and supportive. I spent money on printing, photocopies and postage. Most of the works were submitted to publishers in the US and UK I had painstakingly researched but there was no joy. I could have scratched my head until it was hairless in search of possible answers to my quagmire, but the writing fire would not fizzle out. I was reading a lot, too. Reading is a prerequisite for good writing. The more I read, the better I got at writing.

For my numerous submission efforts, I at least received three rejection letters which consoled me. One was from East African Educational Publishers Limited in Kenya who described me as a prolific writer; another from Heinemann Botswana who also praised my script, the other was from College Press in Zimbabwe who described my work as having great literary merit. I kept the *Love O'clock* manuscript for more than ten years.

When the Zimbabwe Culture Fund Trust (ZCFT) in conjunction with SIDA invited artists to submit their works for possible funding, I jumped at the opportunity and I applied, attaching letters from the three aforementioned publishers in the process. I remember one day after work when we were preparing the manuscript with my publisher when I had to spend the entire night at his office. We could not complete the edits at hand, and when he said, "it's late, let us call it a day now", I volunteered to work a little longer. Little did both of us know that I was going to spend a sleepless night engrossed in the manuscript even if the following day happened to be a working day. My application was successful. There was a limited print run because the released funds were meagre. Consequently, that state of affairs had a bearing on the royalties earned from the book. The funding was the killer punch that broke the back of the camel.

The book was nominated for a national arts merit award (NAMA). It received rave reviews. I was interviewed on TV and radio. One reader confessed to me that he had been inspired to name his bike, *Love O'clock* after the epic poetry collection. *Passion is that power that breaks*

down boundaries, and takes you to unknown places. The text assumed its own life and trajectory. As they say, the rest is history. In response to a number of readers' requests and expectations, a new-look *Love O'clock* edition is on the cards. As I say it is right to write.

Perfil del autor(a)

Sibanda is a Zimbabwean-born poet, novelist, and nonfiction writer who has a passion for themes and topics around conservation, nature, development and justice. He believes that he is a poet in prose, and hence he has never looked back since building and marching into the very first poetry pharmacy in the world, where poetry ... and poetry and poetics are the most tonic threesome prescriptions!

Sibanda has received the following nominations: the National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA), the Mary Ballard Poetry Chapbook Prize, the Best of the Net Prose and the Pushcart Prize. Sibanda`s book *Notes, Themes, Things And Other Things: Confronting Controversies ,Contradictions And Indoctrinations* was considered for *The 2019 Restless Book Prize for New Immigrant Writing in Nonfiction*. Ndaba`s book titled *Cabinet Meetings: Of Big And Small Preys* was considered for *The Graywolf Press Africa Prize 2018*. Sibanda is a three-time Pushcart nominee. He can be spotted landscaping, lurking, lounging and even lost on various and many media networks.

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