

Self-Esteem and Procrastination—How I Became a Writer

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Writing a book can test your self-esteem. You have to build stamina, because it is a blood sport. People often ask me: “Why are you spending all this time trying to write a novel?” Even though I despise that question, my biggest enemy is always my own self-doubt. Writing well is very difficult, and sometimes very painful.

As a writer, I try to move the narrative from my brain into the brains of my readers, using words as my only tools. When I sat down with my idea for *Things Unsaid*, I knew my first draft was going to be a data dump, an image mostly of the main character. Then later I would start chiseling away, going over each word, adding and subtracting.

If you want to write a novel, you need to first write a story. If you want to write a story, you first need to write a paragraph. If you want to write a paragraph, you first need to put together a coherent sentence. And that is what saved me. I wrote phrases, which became sentences, then paragraphs, then scenes. I put myself on a deadline so that every week I would finish some scenes, gradually completing a chapter, then two chapters and so on.

I was going to fight my way through. I’m a writer. I care about writing.

I always care. And I did write, although I couldn't write *Things Unsaid* every day in the beginning. As writers we have to figure out what works for us. And throw the other "stuff" away. Now I know what works for me.

I realize that writing anything is a step forward. Anything. Sometimes I have to force myself to write, so I won't lose momentum. So here are my four tips for conquering procrastination that have helped me:

1) NaNoWriMo month (November) is a great antidote for procrastinators. It is an online forum of writers and forces you to write every day, to reach the magical 90,000 words by the end of the month. I didn't reach that Holy Grail. But, I did reach 30,000 words or five chapters and am now one-third way through the first draft for my second novel. I love you, NaNoWriMo.

2) I reward myself after something—anything—is on the screen. A cup of coffee, a piece of chocolate, gardening for half an hour. It rests the mind and the eyes, and jumpstarts my writing self for the next writing session!

3) I read short stories to get inspired. Such wonderful writers everywhere! I also look at webinars and tutorials. Warning: Don't let this fill up your entire writing day—no more than one webinar a week.

4) I make specific mini-goals with an exact start time and end-time. For

example, I am going to work on a scene between the main character and her daughter for one hour at 11 a.m. That is a mini-goal.

My realistic writing goal, in the beginning, was one hour. If you suffer from anxiety and fear, it may be that your writing dredges up hard-to-tolerate feelings. It isn't writing itself that you dislike, it's the emotions that surface when you write. I remind myself that putting off the writing, in the end, won't make it more enjoyable. I'll feel bad about myself and defeated as a writer. Writers write. If you can find a way to be more welcoming to these emotions, they may grace you with fresh energy and ideas for your muse. Write unplugged!

