

A book for all writers.

The Writer Who Smiles

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The Writer Who Smiles  
By Jacob Malewitz

First Edition

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To my mother and father, for helping during chaos, and showing me the light on the other side.

To all those people who listened to my dreams of being a writer.

To Julia Cameron who inspired this book in so many ways.

## FOREWORD:

I came to writing “The Writer Who Smiles” after a series of accidents in my writing career. One, journalism was getting old. Two, websites weren’t paying me very much. Third and last, I decided, If I am going to be rejected and find failure, I might as well have fun doing it. The book became something that I toyed with on and off while still writing for publications.

It began in February of 2007, with an essay called “The Writer Who Smiles.” I put the idea away for a while, but occasionally saw my name on a book. I went to writing it with no abandon. I loved writing this flawed portrait; it consumed me for three months.

Now, you have this portrait of you and me; we writers have to stick together. I am not genius; nor am I a Julia Cameron or Natalie Goldberg, my main inspirations. I am Jacob Malewitz, a writer who sat down one day, wrote a book review, and 500 articles published later, had lost his way. This book allowed me to find my way back to the main roads, back to the city of life.

The reviewers I asked for critiques either liked or hated the book. Rarely was there an in between. It was a painful process in many ways, but one I had to do. I do not ask much of my readers, only that you pass on your knowledge in your own way; If it involves writing, all the better.

Julia Cameron wanted you to do morning pages, three pages a day of stream of consciousness, and artist dates, a way of rewarding yourself. I think you just need to keep it simple: read and write. I would suggest, for beginning writers, to grab a copy of any of Julia Cameron’s works: they will be your beginning if you can open up your ears and listen.

You will also see the spiritual side I offer: whether it is a higher power, a higher force, or just plain God, I encourage you to keep thinking instead of skipping the pages. Yes, they can sound like lecture, but they also sound like hope.

Lastly, I do not offer exercises in this book. I am a firm believer in them on occasion, but often we just skim past them wanting to continue reading. Reading writers do not need another “write about the loved ones.” I think we just need to write what is on our mind.

And, if ever you feel like writing a book, I tell you what one playwright told me, “Don’t do it.” Deep down, though, you just might have to.

## **1. The Writer Who Smiles**

Before I started writing, I was lost. The words needed to be said. The novels and short stories and articles were the path of choice. But how would I write something that mattered? I could not express myself the right way anywhere. I found hope when I began to journal like Julia Cameron (a noted author who shall be revealed), read author biographies, and started to share my work with others. The thesis for dreaming worked as a multitude more things. When you journal there is a smile waiting, an author biography can light the way, and when someone likes your writing there is the biggest of all smiles.

Early in one novelist and short story writer’s career, a lot of risks were being taken. This writer was a man trying to make it into the science fiction and fantasy scene of the 1950s. He was married and wanted to work as a writer of prose—specifically speculative fiction. The market was big then, a career could be made in the pulp magazines of yesteryear. Yet he still had doubts about whether he was wasting his time. He began to see a therapist, who saw that his dreams were of prose and advised him to study up on the lives of other people with ink in their hair. He did this. He found success. He learned to smile by reading of people like himself. His name is Ray Bradbury, the acclaimed writer who brought fantasy elements to science fiction, and is considered as important a writer of the fantastic as any other genre writer.

We cannot all be Ray Bradbury, but there are a few things we can learn from that story. One can be successful and not be religious. But religion has been important to many a writer: Blake proposed the holy spirit acted through him; Julia Cameron said the Great Creator works through all writers in a way—whether they like it or not. Bradbury found the gift of smiling by knowing he was not alone in the cause to write. He did not find God. He found himself. Either, both, whatever works for the writer is fine as long as they enjoy the ride, hate being lost, and love being found.

My opening line may have caught you, but I do believe in those words. Back before I made out to be a writer, many things made me sad. One day I would be funny. The next day, not even a sunrise would make me quibble. This developed in school. I worked hard some days, other days just goofed off. Until I figured out my best prose—my best jokes—were when I wrote, I had no other solution. The people in the schools and jobs would laugh at my jokes and listen to my words, but the respect was not there. I had nothing to respect on the inside; little on the outside. I did not smile. For the writer who

smiles, there is a journey to be taken. We will cry. We will smile. And we will work on prose that makes us do both, or want to, at the same time.

As writers, we seek the absolutes of life. We need to reaffirm who we are with every work. The novel, short story, article, biography—none of it is enough. We want to tell jokes to no one on the page, and then smile when someone misses the line. We work on our insides as much as the outsides. When we smile as writers, and when we find that the best therapy is prose, we begin down to a road that is full of that thing I would call life.

Sometimes we forget the power of smiling. We have a void within us we think a therapist or a pill can cure. We will only find out what we already know: If we work hard on anything, we have a chance of success, and just a chance. *Chance* is the kill word for many who pursue the 9-5 job with the steady paycheck. We can find that the odds are not in our favor, but that is the way many writers start. Some, like classic writer Henry James, don't publish a book until they are thirty. Others start in their twenties, like Virginia Woolf, but regret having not started earlier. It is my assumption that Woolf found she could smile while writing masterpieces like "To The Lighthouse." She was also a writer who must have cried—she killed herself.

I discover it in other places. I have many writing friends who laugh at my jokes. I am a recovering addict who always plays around with the words of a 12 step group I am in. I did not have to be a Hunter Thompson character with a joint in one hand and ten beers on the floor. I worked through the being with many names, discovered it more in Julia Cameron's "Artist's Way," and found sustenance in reading things which I once hated.

There are points in writing that we won't smile. Instead of finding light or humor, we see the darkness within us. This is not a bad thing. We can write on the darkness, we can relay our feelings to others, we can be human—frail and living a life which can seem pointless. The darkness can be drugs; it can be the absence of a higher force.

We do not have to rush to the therapist or the pill to cure what ails us. Perhaps a friend, a new hobby, or a new love can help us find things. But, the writing should come first. On the page we evolve faster than anywhere else. The pill may take away our edge. The therapist might make us remember smiling, but we forget ability to find true joy. I still have the kid at heart in me. I want more, but I don't always know how to get it. I find it in my prose, because I think a child is in all of us. We find something in childhood and attach ourselves to it. Most of us have the moments of bliss we want to recapture; it can be a photograph of the family at the cabin, or a short story of that allows the writer to discover. The jokes I can tell for the next day come about because I allow myself to write the pages of my novel down no matter how much I don't want to. I write the articles for my career. I write the essays because they sustain me, remind me that I am evolving as a writer. I cannot be a writer like Virginia Woolf, Henry James, or Ray Bradbury, and I am not sure anyone can. We can be who we are and find joy in that. We discover the writer can smile in their own way.

I was dying inside until I found the gift of prose. I worked my way into the field. I asked questions—many stupid ones—and continue to ask them to this day. Asking questions usually leads to smiling: we all want the answers, and many of us see joy once we find them. Smiling and crying define what true writing is. If we follow the right road, we may find ourselves grinning at our own jokes, the stories that keep us going.

## **2. The Writer Who Cries**

I dream today. We, as writers, sit in a place where pain is not reacted to with drugs and alcohol. We work out our love addiction, our alcoholic addictions, with the page and the words we find through it. We find that the creator is here with us. Blake wrote through him. We remember Virginia Woolf in this place, and Hemingway, and Hunter Thompson, Richard Yates, William Blake—we cry for all these poets and story tellers. The writer who cries is human. We find a higher power when we find poetic justice.

As a Catholic from birth, I have found some resistance to my dreams. I work out all these aspects of religion in my prose. I question them as much as Christ questioned those who put him on the cross. Writers should not be afraid to think differently. We have too many emotions not to cry. Writing lets this pain out in a way that a therapist could not pull from us, a pill could not make us forget, but, not surprisingly, a great writer could make us remember. We play with absolutes as writers. I, for one, do not cry often, and question why. I read of Richard Yates downing his daily medicine with alcohol, of his flashbacks to World War 2, and I see a pained writer. I have my own pain which did drive me to tears. Writing did not cure it, it reflected it back to me like a mirror, I saw the problem, the disease, but could not medicate it right.

As writers we need to forget all our pained peers and continue anyway. We must allow ourselves this tragedy called writing. If the great American novel, that old cliché, has been written then it was a portrait of an artist living on the fringe of society. It is easy to join up with religion in the face of chaos—really easy—and we writers question it because of that. Julia Cameron, whose religion I am unaware of, called God the “Great Creator” and “Good Orderly Direction.” If the Great Creator were to do anything for us writers, it would be the gift of tears. Nothing else is a roadmap on how to be human. We see what pains us, we apply it to our craft, we bring it out on the page, and we discover a road which can consume a lifetime.

Sometimes the storms will come, our higher power will grow angry. We must let the tears fall to the storm. We pay homage to the creator by working out the reasons for the tears. We write. We avoid writing. We go through all the stages of grief when we choose to be writers. The money is not coming and writers hate asking for loans. The drugs are out of the writer’s system, maybe he or she still writes, but the pain is consuming us. The alcohol looks nice, but we cannot stop thinking of Hemingway and Fitzgerald.

We cure ourselves by writing.

A recommendation: read “The Sound of Paper” by Julia Cameron. It influences everything I touch. “Paper” worked things out in my mind, allowed to write of pain and bliss, and was inspiration in improving a weak belief system. Of all the things I enjoy of the book, it is the morning pages. As in all her books, stream of consciousness writing is the land she explores. I did these morning pages and I cried less. I found pain in me being released. I encourage you to follow the night page. One page of anything, but written at night, because the mind is naturally different at night. Consider the rewards of being a writer along with the risks. We will learn to cry in a different way on the page. We write the morning pages to release. We write the night pages to decompress a day.

I can be cruel to myself. Writers are atypical about that. We hoard our writings and never show them. Do not show anyway your morning pages or your night page (Cameron says you can). But, do not avoid showing those stories. Release them like you must a child. The stories must find their own way when you release them. The pain of criticism speaks to the writer’s hidden side: we think this will stop our writing. Criticism works with us too. We explore different things by seeing what people think. Our future writings become better. Criticism can open the door to smiling amid a new career.

Virginia Woolf worked hard, but seemed doomed with tears. Richard Yates, a genius, found that prose alone could fulfill him no matter the medication or brand of beer he was on. The writer who cries is not a cliché, but a reality.

We must prepare ourselves for the tears as we do the smiles. Always be on guard, but allow for the process to work through. Our higher power illuminates the path, just take the steps cautiously. The tears may not break in the heaven of writers, the place I spoke of at the beginning. Even if the storm covers them away, we find they can feel good, just, in their own way.

Virginia Woolf. Hunter Thompson. Ernest Hemingway. Richard Yates. These were alcoholics, drug addicted writers, depressed writers, and writers who cried. We are not alone in this world. We can find peace. What is peace for the writer? Peace is when a writer discovers the pain they once tried to escape, finding a cure by facing it on the page.



### **3. The Writer In Between**

I am at a point of in between as I write this. My profession, journalism, just might fall through. I was an editor, thought it could be a career for me, but found the pressures too much to bear. My grades went down in school. I could no longer hold my dream job. I am neither excited nor sad; I am at a place in between.

Writers should consider the pressures of their jobs, whether it be as a waitress or a factory worker, when considering to write. Will the job go along with writing? Or will it hinder it? For me, the pain I feel is mixed with happiness: I am free again. But, the steady paycheck is gone. The way people looked at me when I told them I am a newspaper editor will be gone. I do not want another career. I know exactly what I want and I'm acting upon those ambitions. Other writers do not have to lose the job like I did. Certainly they can keep it, but, when success comes, they may want to take a chance.

The initial stages of grief sound like what I am going through. My true "dream job" is to be a freelance writer. I have had enough people tell me that they hate and love my writing that I think this is it for me. If I were to work some other job it would put my dreams on hold. The novelist Richard Yates could never quite cope with working both a regular job and writing at the same time. The regular job drained him of his creative energies. He made the decision to focus on his fiction; but he was also a medicated writer who would down his medicine with alcohol. The madness is a warning for us all. I walk on thin ice. I bring up Yates because I battled some of those inner demons. Do you?

The writer in between can go through something close to the loss of a loved when writing loses its appeal. They become tragedies. Writers can tap into something primal here: people have been trying to capture it since those first cave paintings. The writer's job is to discover his or her way through the pain. Maybe we enjoy telling the stories of the cave paintings. We like adding in the beast waiting outside. But we should be weary of a beast catching up to us at some point, be it drugs or the lack of belief.

The writer who cries, the writer who smiles, and the writer in between are going through cycles. Writers will go through each at some point in their lives. We writers should learn to cope with these, because each will come our way sooner or later. We can avoid the pain in writing, the crying, but it will find us, capture us, then release us to become the writer in between. When we are happy we are in danger of overloading ourselves with

work. A careful eye could throw out a days work when we are happy. A careful eye could see quality in writing the days we are crying or in between.

There is a cliché to going through each: we admit to being powerless over the situation, over our feelings. Writers can surrender it to God, Christ, Allah, Yahweh, Gaia, or the walking angels who touch our world. I release it by my writing, always keeping in mind my higher power, my faith and beliefs. Writers in between are on a journey into a dark ocean. We may not see the water recede as Moses did, or see it flood like Noah, but we can admit to being powerless over the situation.

I have not cried in a long time. The last time was during a mental collapse, the time before that another mental collapse, and the time before that drugs had gotten me kicked out of school. I went through dark waters. I made a mistake and did not ask for the right kind of help. The writer in between need not pray—could and should though—but they can seek a help of different kinds. Many writers seek out other writers. Some seek professional help. Maybe Ernest Hemingway should have spent much more time in the therapy chair instead of escaping into the bottle, but I suppose that's what made him a writer.

The dream job is lost. I am at a place in between. I see the ocean because I am wading through it. If I looked back I could see land. But the ocean is inviting me in. I see a boat in the distance that is moving away fast. I have a chance to catch this powerless flagship. If I do, I can avoid the tears and let the smiles in. And I couldn't have gotten here had I not been experiencing these emotions.

#### **4. A Higher Power is in the Details**

Sometimes I forget my reason for being. Yes, this sounds a bit clichéd. We all hear the question “Who am I” coming into this conversation. I find truth when I am thinking—especially working my way through doubts—and forget much. I try to remind myself a higher power will be found in the details, not the devil. The devil may be more interesting on paper. The higher power may not have all the colorful views on sex and drugs, power and lies. Your higher power can be what you make it. The point is, don’t forget his/her effect on your thinking.

When I discover something in prose, when I build upon an idea and find solutions, I see myself as one of those angels battling for peace in the heavens. Heaven hears our calls on Earth. I have found that the battles for the mind are paramount. The doubts will continue to break me down no matter how much money I make or fame I achieve. Rich people have big problems; fame works only for those who understand chaos. The beer won’t stop the pain of living. The drugs won’t stop the fact I must write to discover a true higher power. What I often don’t see is that, here, in the details, I can find all the things I need to battle doubt, failure, addiction, and the inevitable thinking. Doubt comes not from the devil, not from a creator, but from the inner-workings of our mind.

Money comes in the times when we need it, not the times we demand it. Doubts about financial security are another conversation. But here we have reality. Doubts highlight genius; there would be no Einstein or Da Vinci if not for mankind’s ability to think through doubts. Man thinks too hard on something, and here comes, out from the sky, a solution to all the problems. There will be no end: the money may come, the friends may be lost, but one thing we can always be sure of is doubt. A higher power works through doubt to enlighten and challenge us. Here, in the details, I found a reason to continue to write no matter how many rejections I received. I could make \$300 one week and a fraction of that in the second. I could write 10,000 words one week and nothing the next. Doubt is a capitalist thing, because we feel we must reach for the heaven while still strapped to a desk chair. The solution is to find a thesis for dreaming, and this is someplace between our dreams and our higher power. Writing is the purest way to find that.

In my mind, failure is the root cause of all those lost pages. Just a few days ago I had two articles rejected from an online publisher, four queries denied by one magazine, and a major site I had used stopped accepting articles. All the sunlight I had gathered before

this mattered not; I abandoned my writing. I doubted everything. I feared failure before even trying. Remember: as much as Luke Skywalker or Frodo Baggins failed, so too must we, the creators of heroes and words, fail. I have no positive ending to all this, accept the fact here I am today writing something down again. The higher power I find in the details works with me to battle the fear of failure, the fear of the blank page.

A cause to continue can too be found in the modern addiction. I'm not above this; I don't drink or do drugs, I simply inhale nicotine and gulp down caffeine. But addiction plagues millions on a much larger scale. And it cannot be cured by doing one thing, but by multiple acts. Foremost we remember all the details of the addiction that plagued us, apply how we tried to escape life, and where the solutions came from. If a man sits in a chair all day, he thinks too much. If he writes in a chair all day, he does the same. But he finds the cures for his illness plain in type written by a creator. Pain leads to something in each of us. Finding the right details to put on the page might be hard; just think of all the details that brought you together as a person, multiply them by all the clouds you've ever seen, and you will see a fraction of what your higher power can be.

I battled drug addiction by getting on my knees. Then I got on my knees, prayed, got up, and went to my writing chair. I found more solutions about life doing that than anything else.

So we think all day in the chair and nothing we write is accepted; not by reviewers or friends or even editors. Now, I am in the same boat you are. I love writing when I am paid—a capitalist thing—and expected something to be different for me. Sometimes we can think too much. Today I see no other answer than the cause to write. But I forget sometimes writers must escape the page. Sometimes an artist date is needed, or just going for a walk, because the simplest things are often the easiest solutions.

Life happens for all of us. I write not because of the clichéd "I have too" or the question "Who am I"; I write because there is nothing else above it accept one thing. And when my higher power comes down from the sky and sells my first novel, I might just smile. Until then, I will see that he can be in all the details I am creating. We are the details in our pages, and so is our higher power, and he/she is always closer than we think.

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