

From the INTRODUCTION to *A Year of Writing Dangerously*

Why write?

Because you have to. You have to write down this story that's banging around in your head and in your heart, or it'll be lost. No one else will tell it. And it'll just keep banging or humming away in there, driving you nuts. These are your thoughts and your feelings, your imagination and your memories. This is how you put the vast chaos of your life into order, how you get to the other side. Writing is also how you nail down and get to keep the good moments. How you live more deeply and become more conscious.

Maybe you're new to writing. Or maybe you've been writing for years and are simply in a temporary funk and need to get unstuck. In any case, this is a *why* book. No matter where we are in our writing, we need to be reminded, sometimes day by day, why we're writing, why we ever wanted to do this in the first place, why it's important, and why we feel so antsy and crazy when we're not writing. The why of writing is answered by other writers, a whole chorus of writers whose words can inspire us to get into action and to keep going. Determination is an inside job, but inspiration comes from the outside.

Or maybe you're not antsy and crazy and just happen to be in a rare group of calm, secure, and dignified individuals who simply want to write their story. That's fine, and I hope you'll find all the encouragement you need in this book. However, a little desperation and unsettledness certainly never hurt a writer; we all go through strange and painful periods in our lives, and one of the reasons we read is to find out how other people, real or fictional, navigate the hard times.

Why a year?

Because if you want to write a novel or memoir or autobiography, you'll need a year of focused work to get from the idea in your

head to the reality of a first draft. Or if you want to write short pieces, a year can get you from dreaming about being a writer to actually completing and marketing one or more personal essays or short stories.

Why dangerously?

Because there's always a sense of risk when you write — fear that maybe someone will deny your version of things, or that they'll get mad and disown you, or that maybe you'll make a fool of yourself and expose too much or too little. Writing your own

truth, even under the veils and masks of fiction, will always feel dangerous. It will also feel liberating.

I like to think of this book as a party. Come on in and meet writers who will offer interesting ideas, hold your hand, be right there at your elbow when you have the urge to throw your laptop out the window, writers who have some smart, funny, and inspirational takes on what it means to find the courage to write.

One year. Why not?

A Year of Writing Dangerously by Barbara Abercrombie Published by New World Library 2012

"The Art of Disappearing" by Naomi Shihab Nye

When they say Don't I know you? say no.

When they invite you to the party remember what parties are like before answering. Someone telling you in a loud voice they once wrote a poem.

Greasy sausage balls on a paper plate. Then reply.

If they say We should get together say why?

It's not that you don't love them anymore. You're trying to remember something too important to forget. Trees. The monastery bell at twilight. Tell them you have a new project.

It will never be finished.

When someone recognizes you in a grocery store nod briefly and become a cabbage. When someone you haven't seen in ten years appears at the door,

don't start singing him all your new songs. You will never catch up.

Walk around feeling like a leaf. Know you could tumble any second. Then decide what to do with your time.

(from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*. © The Eighth Mountain Press.)

Why I Write

By Terry Tempest Williams

I write to make peace with the things I cannot control.
I write to create fabric in a world that often appears black and white.
I write to discover. I write to uncover. I write to meet my ghosts. I write to begin a dialogue.
I write to imagine things differently and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change.
I write to honor beauty. I write to correspond with my friends.
I write as a daily act of improvisation. I write because it creates my composure.
I write against power and for democracy.
I write myself out of my nightmares and into my dreams.
I write in a solitude born out of community.
I write to the questions that shatter my sleep. I write to the answers that make me complacent.
I write to remember. I write to forget. I write to the music that opens my heart. I write to quell the pain.
I write with the patience of melancholy in winter. I write because it allows me to confront that which I do not know.
I write as an act of faith. I write as an act of slowness.
I write to record what I love in the face of loss. I write because it makes me less fearful of death. I write as an exercise in pure joy.
I write as one who walks on the surface of a frozen river beginning to melt.
I write out of my anger and into my passion.
I write from the stillness of night anticipating -- always anticipating.
I write to listen. I write out of silence. I write to soothe the voices shouting inside me, outside me, all around me.
I write because I believe in words.
I write because it is a dance with paradox.
I write because you can play on the page like a child left alone in sand.
I write because it is the way I take long walks.
I write because I believe it can create a path in darkness.
I write with a knife, carving each word from the generosity of trees.
I write as ritual.
I write out of my inconsistencies. I write with the colors of memory.
I write as a witness to what I have seen. I write as witness to what I imagine.

I write by grace and grit.
I write for the love of ideas.
I write for the surprise of a sentence.
I write with the belief of alchemists.
I write knowing I will always fail. I write knowing words always fall short.
I write knowing I can be killed by own words, stabbed by syntax, crucified by understanding and misunderstanding.
I write past the embarrassment of exposure.
I trust nothing especially myself and slide head first into the familiar abyss of doubt and humiliation and threaten to push the delete button on my way down, or madly erase each line, pick up the paper and rip it into shreds -- and then I realize it doesn't matter, words are always a gamble, words are splinters from cut glass.
I write because it is dangerous, a bloody risk, like love, to form the words, to say the words, to touch the source, to be touched, to reveal how vulnerable we are, how transient.
I write as though I am whispering in the ear of the one I love.

(for "A Morning of Writing Dangerously")