



Are We Having Fun Yet?



For years, I've asked "If it feels so good to create/write, why do we all have so many ways to avoid it?" As I've explored the psychology and neurology of resistance, I've focused on the "Why are we not creating?" question.

Lately, I've been thinking about looking at the question from the other end of the telescope. Why **do** we create? Why do writers write? Why do painters paint and sculptors sculpt? Why do performers perform and musicians play?

One of the first exercises I give students in my Writing Habit class is to explore the questions "Why write? Who benefits from my writing and how?" I invite you to consider those questions now. Why do you write or paint or perform? Whatever your form of creativity, why do you do it? Go ahead and freewrite about that; I'll wait.

The Envelope Please

So what did you come up with? Do you write/paint/perform/create for any of these reasons that I hear so often from my students?

- To make a difference
- To discover what I think
- To express what I feel
- To share what I think
- To influence people
- To challenge perceptions
- To entertain people
- To make people happy
- To communicate
- To educate
- To leave a legacy behind
- To make sense of my life

- To make sense of the world
- To make money
- To impress someone
- To make the world more beautiful
- To make the world a better place
- To play, to have fun and experience joy

Why should musicians be the only creators who play? We should all be playing, we should all have fun, we should all be joyful. There are distinctions to be made, I know, between "play," "fun," and "joy." And I know there are other valid reasons to create. But I'm going to make the radical suggestion that if you don't ever play, have fun or experience joy in your creating, your chances of fulfilling those other purposes are greatly diminished.

Efficiency vs. Fun

If you've been reading my newsletters for awhile or attended one of my classes, you might be suspicious that anytime I phrase something in the X vs. Y format, I'm about to spring a polarity map on you. But this time, I mean the "vs.," and there's no "both-and" about it.

My blog (www.BaneOfYourResistance.wordpress.com) has focused recently on the debate between the outline-and-order approach to writing vs. the draft-and-discover approach. (I'm sure that this is a polarity). Larry Brooks (www.storyfix.com) responded to one post with an acknowledgment

that both outlining and drafting are viable processes and then observed "...those who advocate drafting claim they aren't able to be as creative or have as much fun if they outline, so that's their process of choice. In my book, effectiveness and efficiency trumps fun, but that's just me."

That is absolutely **not** me. The times when I let effectiveness and efficiency trump fun are the least satisfying times of my life. Reading Larry's comment, I realized I'm not willing to let effectiveness and efficiency trump fun in my writing life.

Of course, that thought was followed by a nasty little voice in my head saying "Maybe that's why I haven't published my novel yet." From the tone of condemnation and the accompanying proclamation of doom, "And I probably never will," I knew that was my Saboteur voice.

Fortunately, I've been revisiting Stephen King's *On Writing*, so I told the Saboteur to shove off. "Oh yeah? Well, Stephen King is a draft-first kind of writer and he thinks writing should be fun, and he's published plenty of novels."

King's Perspective

On pages 149-150 of *On Writing*, Stephen King writes about his son learning to play the saxophone: "Owen mastered the scales and the notes – nothing wrong with his memory, his lungs or his eye-hand coordination – but we never heard him taking off, surprising himself with something new, blissing himself out.... What this suggested to me was that when it came to the sax and my son, there was never going to be any real play-time; it was all going to be rehearsal. That's no good. If there's no joy in it, it's just no good. It's best to go on to some other area, where the deposits of talent may be richer and the fun quotient higher."

I dog-eared that page; I knew I'd want to expand on it in a newsletter or blog someday.

King continues, "Talent renders the whole idea of rehearsal meaningless; when you find something at which you are talented, you do it (whatever it is) until your fingers bleed or your eyes are ready to fall out of your head. Even when

no one is listening (or reading, or watching), every outing is a bravura performance, because you as the creator are happy. Perhaps even ecstatic. That goes for reading and writing as well as playing a musical instrument, hitting a baseball, or running the four-forty."

Work and Play

Now that's a true polarity. It's even one of the polarities Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes about in *Creativity*. (For a refresher, take a look at Vol. 13, Issue 1 of *Imagination InkLinks* at www.rosannebane.com/newsletters/InkLinks-v13-i1.pdf).

Stephen King knows that effort is not antithetical to happiness. There is often a great deal of exertion and commitment – the kind that makes your fingers bleed – in finding creative joy.

King declares, "If you don't want to work your ass off, you have no business trying to write well... (p. 144)."

Creative people are willing to work, to challenge ourselves and push ourselves to achieve our dreams. And we're willing to play. We recognize that play is essential. All work and no play makes Jack not only dull, but completely devoid of creative insight and energy.

That may be a big part of why I've published this newsletter for so long and why I'm blogging. Writing in these forms is play. Writing my novel was play. So was writing my novella. And the new story I'm working on now, that's play too.

It's when I start looking for publication that the not-so-fun part comes up. Sending out queries, waiting for responses, most of which are letters declining the opportunity to publish my great prose, that's not so fun. But, when the acceptance letter comes through, or even an encouraging letter saying, "This doesn't work for us, but I'd like to see more of your writing" – that trumps the not-so-fun parts.





A coaching client of mine writes hilarious newsletters from an alter ego just for giggles and makes collages for fun. A Loft Master

Track student I know, who also happens to be a dancer and dance instructor, steps outside her declared writing specialty to write screenplays just to play around with something different. A fellow teaching artist who's published several books has just completed the first draft of her first YA novel and already she's missing the fun of drafting.

What do you do just for fun, for creative play? Do you have enough joy as an artist? If not, what beliefs and behaviors are stopping you? I hereby grant you permission to play creatively, and I ask

you to give yourself that same permission. Just think how much better the world would be if everyone could take just ten minutes a day to do something that brings them joy!

Creative or Efficient – You Decide

I may need to examine where I need to “work my ass off” with the not-so-fun stuff to get the joy of seeing my novel published. Larry Brooks is probably right about drafters like me needing to take a good look at story structure. I may look at how I can make my writing and my writing time more effective. But one thing I know I will **not** do is try to make my writing process efficient.

The truth is that creativity is NEVER efficient. Pick one, because you can't have both. If you're not willing to be inefficient in your creativity, you're doomed to either censor yourself into an enormous and painful block, or be perpetually disappointed in yourself.

Change of Scenery

So what specifically can you do to bring more fun into your creative life? Your own intuition, the small voice that says “You know, it might be fun to try ...” is probably going to be your best guide once you give yourself permission to play and get in the habit of looking for fun. But to get you started, I suggest you change the scenery.

Create in a different space. Take yourself to a different, fun place to write, sketch or practice. Set up shop in your favorite local eatery or the children's museum or a micro-brewery or at a waterpark (just keep the laptop or easel out of the splash-zone). In cold weather, go to a conservatory or a tropical garden. In warm weather, go to the water: ocean, lake, river, pond.

Change the space you have. Add fresh flowers, a water fountain, bubbles, toys, a squirt gun, a harmonica or thumb piano, Play-Doh, new music, better lighting, etc. to your workspace.

Pick a fun setting. Let your characters take a vacation from their usual setting; take your interview subjects out of their predictable routines; discover new images and ideas by exploring someplace new to you. Potential fun locales could be a roller derby, dog agility trial, circus, Disneyland, state or county fair, the Great Barrier Reef, a medieval castle, a new-to-you museum (the Baseball Hall of Fame if you are not a baseball fan, for example).

Get a new hobby. Add some sport or science element to your art to mix things up. Give your characters an adventurous hobby, maybe one you've always wanted to try or one you're a little chicken to actually do: spelunking, whitewater rafting, parasailing, skeet shooting, running with the bulls in Pamplona, ballroom dancing.

Do field research. If you can swing it financially, travel to some of the interesting places and try some of the cool hobbies your characters or subjects are exploring. Put yourself on location in a different country's museums, galleries, auditoriums and parks. Check with your accountant – it might even be a legitimate expense on your Schedule C.

Put your own twist on scenery changing. Send me an email about how changing your space changes your creative life.



Creativity is, by definition, exploring the new, the novel, the unexpected connection. Efficiency is repeating a learned behavior to achieve the same result again and again with minimum investment of time and energy. The two are mutually exclusive.

You can't have assembly-line efficiency when you're doing something you've never done before. Oh, you can be efficient in how you prepare your workspace and materials, in how you get started and how you finish, but at some point you leave the familiar behind to enter the mystery of creativity. At that point, expectations of efficiency have to be left behind as well.

When you enter that mystery, the real work begins. Before that, it's just preparation and maybe a little procrastination and posturing. The mystery is also where the real fun begins. Your willingness to surrender to the mystery and uncertainty, to not know exactly where your writing/art is taking you, how you'll get there, or even if you will get there, that willingness is the wellspring of your joy.

Why do I write? To nudge myself to surrender to the mystery that will take me to my joy.

Are we having fun yet? In the middle of all this work? In the midst of this uncertainty and confusion? When I remember that part of why I write is to discover joy in the mystery, I let myself enjoy the ride and I have a blast! I hope you do, too!

Please contact me to talk about coaching or classes

612-722-4139 Rosanne@RosanneBane.com

Student Comments:

Rosanne taught me to make writing a habit, and I write every day now, and have for two years. She helped me discover my heart. I would recommend her classes and services to anyone.

Entering the Flow got me writing! This class provided a structure to go in deep and churn out ideas and pages.



NEW! The Creativity Habit at Bloomington Art Center (Thursdays, 9:30 to 11:30 am, Sept 17 thru Oct 8 or Tuesdays, 9:30 to 11:30 am Oct 27 thru Nov 17) For writers, artists and other creatives. Three simple habits will allow you to carve out the time you always dreamed of for your creativity. For more information or to register, go to www.BloomingtonArtCenter.com.

The Writing Habit at the Open Book (Wednesdays, 5 to 7 pm, Sept 16 thru Oct 21) or Oakdale Washington County Library (Thursdays, 1 to 3 pm, Oct 29 thru Dec 10). Give yourself a place to work and play with your writing. You will be encouraged and supported as you develop sustainable writing habits, become accountable to yourself and take action to achieve your writing goals.

Entering the Flow at the Eagan Dakota County Library (Thursdays, 1 to 3 pm, Sept 17 thru Oct 22). A whole new way to blend work and play and to develop structure while embracing imaginative discovery. You'll spend the majority of class time 'dreamstorming' and writing in a relaxed, meditative state.

Writing Our Way Through Shadow at the Open Book (Wednesdays, 5 to 7 pm, Oct 28 thru Dec 9) All writers have a shadow side that can show up as the inability to play, a missed deadline, censoring yourself or feeling blocked or afraid. We'll explore these and other shadow issues specific to writers.

For more information or to register for Loft classes, go to www.loft.org or call 612-879-8999.