



## Why I Write

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LAST YEAR, MY SISTER AND I cleared out our parents' house. Our father had died a decade earlier and, some months into the Covid pandemic, our lovely mother had followed him. So now this house where they'd lived for many years had to be emptied and sold. As anyone who's cleared their family home knows, this is like a poignant kind of archaeology. An excavation of all the debris of two long lives, layered with clues to the people your parents once were. And amongst it all, the binbags and boxes, disarming glimpses of your own childhood self. A strip of photo-booth snaps tucked into a book. A school jotter with illicit notes scrawled between friends at the back of the class. A sisterly tiff resolved with a contrite message in fat felt tip pen. And in our case, a significant number of small, homemade books.

These were generally a few foolscap pages, folded in half and held together with now-yellowing Sellotape. There'd be a jacket design of course, a title, an ornate declaration of authorship, a blurb on the back, then inside some carefully written page numbers, a table of contents at the front, an index at the back, and often not an awful lot in between; just a drawing of a cat or a crow, a fun fact or a couplet of abysmal verse. But – and this was clearly the point – we had written a book; in fact, between us, several books. We were authors, my sister and I. And the joy of it still rose from those pages found more than forty years later at the bottom of a drawer.

A glimmer of that childish appetite for self-expression, that need to tell a story of your own, is there at some level behind every impulse to write.



I'm not sure that any of us who do this for a living ever entirely grow out of *that*. But if that's the formative urge, the impulse, then once you doing this for publication and for a readership, then you quickly learn that you actually do have to put something of value between those covers. You've got to take that foolish impetus and do something with it, until it's not just about you anymore. For me, this is where the *why?* of writing comes in. It emerges, often quite organically, through the process itself, as you work to shape a story that makes a difference.

So to me, it's all about this *why?* — not the *what?* (because there's always fresh stories to tell), or the *when?* (because in my case it's always a couple of hours/days/weeks/months after I should have started); it's not the *where?* (because I'm lucky to have a room of my own now, with a desk and a window), or even the *how?* (because I know by now that writing's often hard and you just have to stick at it)—but I've come to realise that the *why?*, the *who cares?*, the *so what?*, are questions to which there's no single answer, but that the writer must ask herself every single day.