



Inspiration

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I LOVE AN INSPIRATIONAL quote. (As long as it's not 'Live, Love, Laugh'.) One of my favourites is from Isabel Allende: 'Show up, show up, show up, and after a while the Muse shows up, too'.

Yes! The best way to find inspiration is to go looking for it within the act of writing itself. Being a writer is like being a runner: if you've bought the running shoes and the snazzy shorts, but you've never got around to taking them out of their packaging, you can wait as long as you like for the inspiration to get yourself out running, but you'll never be a runner until your feet hit the ground. So what if you run slowly at first? So what if you get out of breath and everything aches to start with? If you do it regularly enough, you'll build up strength and you'll find your pace. Heck, soon you might even start to enjoy it.

This is how it is for me, even if what I write at first is a stumbling false start — completely uninspiring twaddle. I just keep going. And after a while if I've put in enough hours, if I've proved to the Muse that I am dedicated and loyal, there comes a time when she does indeed arrive, unexpectedly and unannounced, in all her golden glory. And when this happens I don't have time for inspirational quotes. I don't have time to eat or drink or go to the loo or change my clothes. My family ceases to exist for me, the dog doesn't get walked and the laundry and washing-up sit in piles. And I don't care! Because I have found inspiration! Or it has found me... And it's like being in love when you can't get enough of one another. Like freewheeling downhill on my bike when I was ten. Like flying through



the air on a zip wire. It's the most exhilarating funfair ride of my life. And I'm not going to stop, oh no. I've got it now. This is what I've been waiting for. THIS is inspiration, and I'm never going to let it go!

Except that I will. Because, just like that love affair or that bike ride or that rollercoaster, inspiration doesn't last. No one can sustain that amount of adrenalin for ever. But when inspiration leaves, I mustn't forget what it felt like. For it's the promise of inspiration that keeps me going in the dark days when the words are refusing to budge. When I am chipping away at a lump of marble, despairing at ever getting to the perfectly sculpted image I just know lies within. When I am grinding out the sentences and they are not joining up, not making sense.

Not.

Going.

Anywhere.

And then I'll have to start again. Showing up. Just a little, every day. Going gently. Going quietly. Showing up, showing up, showing up. In the hope that, after a while, the Muse will too.