



## Writing/Life Balance

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**D**ID YOU KNOW it's good luck to catch a falling leaf? Someone close to me has ADHD. I've often thought that trying to apprehend their intelligence is like trying to catch a beautiful autumn leaf on a windy day.

Being a writer is like that. You put yourself beneath the canopy, arms wide, fingers outstretched, hoping for a leaf fall. Often it's a single, slim, darting projectile. You leap and grab, or try a different technique, keeping still, as you can't predict its path, only clenching your fist when it's close enough — that moment, phrase, shift in the story that rings true.

Mostly it's just you, on your own, standing under a tree.

Now you're the last one in the park. Lights have flickered on in the streets beyond. The council worker whose job it is to lock up is driving his vehicle along the widest path, orange light pulsing on top of the cab.

Time to go. You turn. The light is failing. One last glance over your shoulder —

*Oh My God! There's one!* You dash back, dodging the sighing bloke in high viz, dive to the ground, make the perfect forward roll and clap both your hands...on a beauty!

Council Guy makes an exaggerated, exhausted gesture with his shoulders, fingers drooping as if he's about to touch his toes. He slips one hand



through your crooked elbow, pulls you to your feet, and escorts you to the gate. All the while, your palms press against the leaf as in prayer. It's still supple, not too crispy. It'll make it into your story intact.

At home the lights are out. No-one's eaten. There's one last tupperware tub of lentil bolognese in the freezer. Just enough to feed whoever you're responsible for feeding.

You'll have an egg, three slices of toast and some hula hoops, before slipping into your elasticated pyjamas and loading the dishwasher.

You sit down to watch TV, excited about the online box set you've begun, before being told a) everyone's watched it to the end without you and b) it's slipped off 4OD now anyway.

I intended this as a lecture about not missing your own life. I was going to explain that writing won't replace the life you've skipped while you were doing it. Any success you have will never give you back those moments, or others like them.

But living in your head is a choice. It can't compete with living in the real world.

They're different spaces. Different states. They'll jostle and shoulder each other. Important stuff will get pushed out on either side. And you'll get cross. All you can do is maintain a basic level of health and safety; do the writing you need to do to stay sane; and go through the days.

What other option do you have? Give up writing? I don't think you'd be listening to this if you could do that.