



Why I Write

Susan Elliot Wright

WRITING IS SOMETHING I've felt compelled to do from early childhood — diaries, letters, poems, stories. I can't remember a time when I didn't write in some form or other. I've always loved telling stories, and as a child, I'd embellish anecdotes to make them more interesting, more dramatic. If there were no anecdotes to tell, I'd invent something, then be told off for 'fibbing'.

Growing up, I read voraciously and dreamed of becoming a novelist, but the dream seemed an impossible one. People like me didn't become authors. I didn't come from a literary family, didn't even go to university until I was in my thirties. But writing was something I was good at, and I enjoyed the challenge of making the words on the page say exactly what I was trying to express.

I first wrote professionally as a magazine journalist, producing hundreds of features and a few nonfiction books. Back then, I'd say I wrote partly for the joy of crafting sentences that were both unequivocal and elegant, and partly for the money — the fees for magazine features were pretty good in the late nineties.

My early attempts at fiction were dire, but I kept going. I loved creating characters and imagining worlds I could escape into. Gradually, I learned more about structure and pace and narrative drive, and I discovered that writing a novel is much more difficult than I'd realised. Who'd have thought it would be so hard to make stuff up? And yet I must, even



though I find the process of producing a first draft nothing short of torturous. Like Dorothy Parker, I love ‘having written.’ I love the magic of it. Sometimes, when I sit down to write, despondent because my mind feels empty, as though nothing worthwhile can possibly emerge, the magic happens anyway. Somehow, as if my hand is guided by an unseen force, the moment I put my fingers to the keyboard, words start to appear on the screen in front of me, and not only do they make sense, sometimes they’re really not bad at all.

So I write partly for the joy of creating beautiful prose, but also because it helps me to understand and make sense of issues close to my heart, and if I can make sense of things through my writing, maybe my readers will, too. I write because I want to leave a legacy for my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, so they can know me through my writing; I write because I want to entertain myself and others; I write because I love to read, and because I have learned how to turn everyday events and situations into stories; I write because I want to move people as I myself have been moved by what I’ve read; I write for the joy I feel on receiving a message from a reader who has loved my work.

More than anything else, I write because I am compelled to do so; because I can’t *not*.