

DARE
to Write in a
FLASH

**Learning and Fine Tuning
the Art of Writing**

Toni Kief

The Writers Cooperative of the Pacific Northwest
Seattle, Washington 2018

This book is dedicated to the
Writers Kickstart of Snohomish, WA.
Struggling together for longer than expected.

Special Thanks to Celena D. Dunivent.
Thanks for your encouragement and the
excitement of your Flash stories.

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– INTRODUCTION –

From Me to You

I approached retirement with no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. I didn't pick up the creative pen until I was sixty years old. It is important to realize that when I took English, Agatha Christie was still alive. Here I sat with a High School diploma and twenty- three years of community college required courses (which includes six years of yoga). Not a single writing class on my resume. I'll admit, I had written a couple of pieces that were poetry-like. What a surprise to learn poetry has rules; I claim they don't always apply to the poet. In the days contemplation, I was forced to realize how little I knew.

At a fortuitous moment, an acquaintance of mine said, (and this is an exact quote) "I want to write more."

As any good friend would do, I wanted to encourage him. So, my answer was, "If you write – I'll write." Unplanned time had passed, now retired with time to invest, I fulfilled my promise. I have three completed novels, a fourth in motion, short story compilations and two more books in the hopper. I spoke with a few local authors, and the familiar tale was that they often started as a child. They claim that

they knew as soon as they were capable of holding a #2 pencil. I searched for support and encouragement.

Unbeknownst to me, I have prepared. I've been a reader ever since Fun With Dick and Jane. That practice provided unacknowledged tools. My next decision, maybe one of the best, was to join a writing group. Unsure where to go, I learned of MeetUp.com. They offer groups of all kinds darn near everywhere. I found Writer's Kickstarter. We met at a deli, talked, bragged and wrote. We eventually began writing Flash Fiction pieces based on prompts. As the group grew we placed a limit of five hundred words. The writing exercises taught so much on using the best words and trusting your readers to participate. The readers' imagination fills in many details. You need to describe, but don't be a maniac. No one wants to know "he had intense, sparkling, blazing blue eyes" thirty times. Leave some of those cursed adverbs in the delete pile and trust your reader's imagination. If you need to add a descriptive to a verb, search for a better verb.

The steps to become a writer:

1. Read books
 - a. Big books and small books.
 - b. Long books, and short books.
 - c. Books in genres you like.
 - d. Books in genres you have avoided.
 - e. Read books similar to what you want to write.
 - f. Learn, don't imitate or copy.
2. Use a thesaurus and a dictionary (digital or print) and use them until they are tattered.

3. Set manageable goals.
 - a. If you set a small goal, it is easier to start, and you are rewarded with much more.
 - b. I also reward myself when I accomplish the goal. It started being \$1 a day, but that didn't work, because I knew where the money was kept. Now, I work to earn quality English Breakfast tea. If I don't put in a serious effort, I have to drink the 2 for \$5 bargains from the grocery store.
4. Follow the old advice: butt in chair, pen in hand.
 - a. Outline or not depending on how you create. Keep track of characters and details that you can refer to when necessary.
 - b. I have a character spreadsheet clipped to my office lamp and a giant whiteboard on the wall.
 - c. A warmer for tea, coffee or beverage of choice. (A little spoiler. Nothing worse than a tepid hot drink or a warm cold one to break your concentration).
 - d. Get the first draft on the page. Don't edit, don't judge. Write.
 - e. Once finished go back and reread, watch for repeated phrases and slangs that can confuse readers.
 - f. Read it out loud. You catch things your silent brain has hidden from you.

- g. Edit your manuscript after it's written.
 - h. You need someone else to read it after you have been through the document multiple times and are convinced it is perfect. (Beta readers, not sisters, etc.)
 - i. Find a good editor.
 - j. You don't have to accept all edits but consider them and be open.
- 5. Don't forget: all stories have been told before. It's up to you to create something with originality and the brilliant flair only you can supply.
 - 6. One more time—read.
 - 7. Okay, and review works by others. We all need the input and encouragement.

GET BUSINESS CARDS AND TAKE ON THE TITLE OF WRITER/AUTHOR ADD IT TO YOUR NAME TAGS.

– FLASH 1 –

Fame and Fortune in 5 Steps

1. You have an original story rolling around in your brain, been there for years. It's time to write. Go to Target; buy a large spiral notebook, pens, paperback dictionary, and binder. While there check out the plastic picnicware and try on shoes that match nothing. Buy sandwich supplies and water bottle; you will need these while penning the best story since Steinbeck died. Head home inspired and ready.
2. Driving past Best Buy ponder the pros of writing your inspiration on your computer, editing will be easier. Make U-turn to purchase a zip drive to protect your tale of humor and quiet wisdom. Check out the \$5 movie bin, put back Ernest goes to Camp, you didn't like that movie in 1987, and it is still stupid. While bent over looking at a bug zapper, Greg, the teenaged clerk will offer help. Ask him where they keep the zip drives, returning

to the task. Turning to walk towards the rear of the store where he pointed, stop to test the 3 D glasses and watch dolphins frolic in the early mist on a 78 - inch color TV. Proceed through home entertainment towards the zip drives. Price printers; you will need one for the profound inspiration of a life well lived. Play Angry Birds on sample tablet, and gasp at the price. A six-gigabyte zip drive is \$39.99. When did that happen? Use two credit cards to pay for a laptop with a free printer. Much better investment than a zip drive, because you can work anywhere and produce the next New York Times break out hit while at Starbucks.

3. Set the alarm for 6:00 a.m., you know your muse is sharpest in the mornings. Hit snooze, and again at 6:30, 7, 7:30. Rise at 8:30 sharp, to set up the laptop, feed cats, clean litter box, eat cold English muffin. Take a shower, and dress comfortably. Wear raggedy sweater that would have made Sylvia Plathe giggle. Return to Best Buy for a wireless router so you can connect to the internet, for access to Thesarus.com. This will be a mandatory tool for your in-depth treatise on Puritan politics. Your brother calls to meet at Denny's and use free beverage coupon that's due to expire. Stop at Half Price books spend 2 hours 45 minutes

- and \$127 for cookbooks, writers guide and a mystery series by Tony Hillerman. Immediately, upon your return home, connect to X-Finity Direct TV and watch Ernest Goes to Camp, cost \$2.99, savings of \$2.01. Read Coyote Waits until 12:11 a.m.
4. Set the alarm for 7 a.m. to start when you are fresh. 7:40, open laptop, check email and post status on Facebook about starting the next great saga of bravery, struggle, improbable science, and deception in medieval Scotland. 2:45 p.m. sign off Facebook and go back to word document. Spend three hours on 500 - word prompt based on garlic for Writer's Kickstart meeting.
 5. Call into work at 6:45 a.m. beg for a personal day. Open word doc and type, *It was stormy on that dark night...*

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– FLASH 2 –

No Room Big Enough

She lies naked and silent on a dirty mattress with one thin blanket. Her skin has paled and her muscles wasted as she continues to breathe one inhalation at a time waiting for death. The only difference between night and day is the sounds upstairs; a life where she plays no part. For a while she tried to keep track of time, but it only made things worse, knowing which days he would turn on the overhead light.

All hope had deserted her a long time ago, but this day was different. Something new to the blackness someone else may not have noticed, but she had nothing else to do but search the shadows. A single dot of light appeared on the ceiling. Over the hours it crept down the wall and then disappeared near the cage where she could almost touch it. And she decided to live another day.

On the third morning, she imagined where the sunlight had been through the night. On the tenth day, she visualized it warming rice paddies in China. She could smell the new growth of tiny shoots and the wetness of the water flooding the rows in the fields. The brilliance of her sunbeam encourages the plants to grow, and she would hoe until her back aches. She

begins to stand up and move her arms and legs, the chains transform into farming tools.

After a while, she harvests the rice and fills canvas bags with the tiny grains of her labor. As the light kisses the ceiling, she loads Apoo, her donkey, and begins to walk. With the sunbeam, they traversed deserts and into the mountains of Nepal. She walks for days, finding grass and water for the cantankerous beast, as they continue the journey.

They arrive in India, and she unloads the rice and sells it for golden coins. She buys a blanket for Apoo and a carrot they can share. Instead of going back to China, they decide to continue west. Weeks go by in the noisy and colorful land. She tours the countryside and on the days the light doesn't appear they visit cities and towns. Surrounded by foreign music and the smells of exotic food prepared in the street.

The only plan was west when they enter Pakistan and climbed mountains she had never imagined existed. As the angle of the light changes and there are more dark days, the duo enter Afghanistan. Weeks pass with quiet, lovely women who teach her about courage in their single room homes. She smells cooking oil and she honors the challenge of feeding children in times of war.

The shaft of light becomes brighter as they travel to Turkey. She smiles remembering the day she loaded Apoo on a fishing boat to travel to Greece. He is not a seafaring beast. The brilliant turquoise water calls, but knowingly, the twosome continue west.

Slowly her journey continues, confident everything changes. Days, weeks and months pass steadily as

she gets stronger. Vicariously she lives a full life and rests with the hope of another day. She will not only survive her imprisonment, but she thrives. Margaret takes back her name and knows there is no room big enough to contain her, not now, not ever, and freedom will return when they reach Paris.

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– WORK SECTION 1 –

Kickstarter Writer Prompts

Pick A Number Between 1 and 100

Write approximately 500 words.

1. Standing Here Naked
2. I Believe
3. First Date
4. When I Was A Child
5. The Inhuman Condition
6. Hemingway Walks into A Bar
7. Broken
8. Everyone Loves A Monster
9. Dirty Secrets
10. On Some Level, He Knew It Was Wrong
11. Finding Your Voice
12. The Jury Is In
13. Tarot Cards
14. Roles
15. Finding the Beauty
16. Groups of Five
17. Shoes
18. First and Main
19. Cookies and Curtains

20. Airstream Trailer
21. Half-Empty Can of Kerosene
22. Decomposing Alligator Snout
23. One Sousaphone
24. Mannequin – Missing Its Head and Dressed in Swim Trunks
25. It Was an Accident
26. Too Much Magic
27. Here I Am Again
28. Ohio
29. A Character from Literature
30. An Albatross
31. In a Class Alone
32. A Trip to Mars
33. That's Rich
34. I Like Having A Choice
35. Good Housekeeping
36. Don't Eat the Purple Ones
37. She's Off Her Medication
38. Deep into The Mystic
39. The Boy Beside the Mailbox
40. Who Will Save The Princess?
41. Walking on The Edge of The Alphabet
42. Two Camels and A 45
43. A Watch That Doesn't Tell Time
44. Nestled in The Corner of The Attic
45. Stress, Taxes, Surgery and A Birthday
46. Words Are Not Enough
47. They Have A Poet in The Family
48. Five Weeks Before the Wedding
49. Themes and Succession
50. A Case for Real Virtually

51. The Bus Pulled Away
52. Cookie Conspiracy
53. I Had to Decide Now
54. The Hokey Pokey
55. Between Two Worlds
56. Must Be Up to Something
57. Somewhere I Lost an Inch
58. Two Men and A Flapping Tarp
59. Lust Is A Must
60. Northwest Sunglasses
61. Starbucks Shortage
62. Is There Passage After Dusk?
63. He Must Be Up to Something
64. The Machine Don't Care
65. Give Her the Usual
66. She Died While Fixing Breakfast
67. Where Do You Go for Peace?
68. Before the Bonfire
69. Last Thing on My List
70. A Stranger's Goodbye
71. Your Teeth Are on The Counter
72. Things Take Up Residence
73. I'll Bet She Was A Nun
74. He Has A Drinker's Sunburn
75. The Unreachable Destination
76. The Night Pressed Around Her
77. Innuendo
78. A Closet Pillow Pounder
79. She Sees What She Imagines
80. The Red Box
81. Blue Edge of Darkness
82. White Moon of Winter

83. When I Ruled the World
84. She Tossed It
85. Attention Guests
86. The Best Laid Plans
87. Strewn Path of Unfinished Stories
88. Don't Get Comfortable
89. Gone Again
90. In Surreal Time
91. Evil Wicked Mean and Nasty
92. Whiskey Before Breakfast
93. Lost in The Page
94. The Elephant in The Room
95. Why Not
96. False Positive
97. Kelly Blue Book
98. Do You Know Who I Am
99. Bizarre Bazaar
100. I Just Thought You Should Know

– WORK SECTION 1–

Now Write Your Story

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END – Wasn't hard, was it?