

I Do All the Sweating

By Kelly Mullins

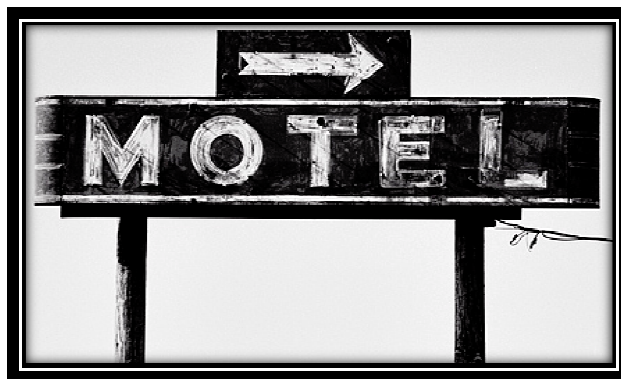
I remember the first word I read on my own, unassisted by an encouraging adult. I remember it as vividly as a child's imagination can be. My Mom and Dad were in the front and four-or-five year old little me sat in the back of our old Volare station wagon. That back seat was a fortress to me. It was vast and I didn't have to wear a seat belt back then so I was free to roam. It was dark and we were on some journey, going to some destination for which I cared not a whip. I was simply happy to be travelling. It was a time for me to unleash my unquenchable imagination.



I'd look out at the speckled blinking lights of some approaching city and pretend they were my servants. I was the King of Lights and every beam was joyfully at my command. I was a noble Lord and my servants loved me so. They stretched out there long, brilliant arms to pull our great blue chariot on down the road.

Travelling through some unknown, unrecognizable town, one light caught my eye. It was a sign, lit like others, but with letters in a combination that seemed familiar to me. I had seen this sign before, in other towns. It stood out, higher than the rest and it held my attention as I began to sound the letters out in my head.

M-O-T-E-L



“Mmmmoooo,” silently, I mouthed the words, tasted them experimentally together, like mixing peas with mac-and-cheese to see if the peas taste better.

“tulll...,” I continued, not to be distracted, and it hit, “MOTLE!!! Mom, that sign says, ‘Motle’! I read it on my own!”

I got it! I had arrived. I could read. I puzzled it out and would no longer be forced to draw only pictures to Grandma on the backs of letters my Mom had written. I could now write my own letters and it would be good. If I could learn to read this, then what other roadside signs would reveal their wordy secrets to me?

That’s when I was hooked. My life, from that day on, would be a series of puzzles to figure out. It started with simple phrases scratched on those letters to Grandma.

I love you Grandma

Love,

Kelly

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

(That means kisses and hugs; another odd anomaly of the written word I was overjoyed to discover)

By the time I was in grade school, putting words together to unleash their secrets was my secret joy. I made the neighbor girl help me act out the puppet show I had written for my parents when I was in third grade. In fourth grade, I had shoe-boxes full of stories, songs, and comic strips scribbled down in faded pencil on dirty-white, lined paper (with illustrations of course).

I wish I still had those shoe-boxes, but I don’t. I don’t know what became of them either, but I assume they were put into storage some time ago and forgotten. Lost in the move.

Somewhere along the way, my need and desire to write followed suit and was packed away in a box marked “STORAGE – SAVE FOR LATER.” At times I thought that it too had been lost in the move, but I have always been able to rummage around a little, pull it back out and reminisce.

Now, I hang my love of writing proudly on the refrigerator door, because I’ve come to realize something important. This is my destiny. This is the reason my imagination was so wild in the back seat of that beloved old blue car. I was meant to write.

How do I write? I hate to admit it, but it really is a natural process. I've never taken a moment to consider *how* I write. When I finally did, I was surprised to find out that one existed, was in place, and worked. In all honesty, I don't always complete the steps below. Sometimes I repeat the first two steps over and over. Regardless, this very simple format looks something like this:

Step 1: Get an idea or an assignment.

Step 2a: Obsess for two or three days. For at least two days, I must over-think it so much that I sometimes suffer insomnia. I write the story or paper over and over in my head. I occasionally attempt to put one of these ideas on paper, but it typically tends to be too much... so I toss it out.

Step 2b: Begin the stages of self-loathing. Think about how I always want to overdo it. Decide that I'm not a writer. Consider alternatives to my dream. This may sound horrible, but it really is a functional part of the process. It's the other arch of the pendulum-swing from step 2a, and has the effect of bringing me back to earth, where the computer that I write on happens to be located.

Step 3: Forget the idea or assignment for a day. This is where I give my subconscious time to work things over. I go about my business and that little four or five year old plays with it in the back of that blue station wagon. He does all the heavy lifting. I do all the sweating.

Step 4: Sit in front of my computer with the intention of doing something mindless, like checking my email, and a short time later, I have a solid start to a first draft done and spewing out of the printer before I realize what has happened. On the best days, I do not edit during this step, but most of the time, I cannot stop myself.

Step 5: Edit and re-edit. Sometimes, I must repeat steps two and three during this process, but in short intervals (and to a much lesser degrees of severity). At this point, I have something real and valid and I'm excited about it. If, at this point, I am wholly satisfied, and have already visited step five, I can skip to step seven.

Step 6: I must disclaim: this step is one I must forcibly exert on myself, rather than include it as a weak part of step five. This is where I revise. I take edited parts that must be removed and remove them. I break apart paragraphs. I add paragraphs. I reword

sentences. I stick my tongue out at some words, because I don't like them where they currently reside and then replace them. In fact, this entire step was included during my first revision. It was a real mess, readjusting the numbers of the steps and then finding references to other steps within each step and make corrections (this sentence was *intended* to be as confusing as the process was).

Step 7: Give it to someone else. It's *absolutely* imperative that a set of eyes that do not reside in my skull give it a good, thorough look-see. My wife is usually my first guinea pig, and God bless her, she muddles through it like a champ. After her, any poor victim will do just fine. I hand it out and if they reach for it... I figure they have accepted the task. The more eyes the better at this point. Sometimes, the result is numerous repetitions of step six.

Step 8: Print, staple, put away. Let it rest a bit before I turn it in or send it off.

What do I write about? All of it. When I was younger, I thought I wanted to be a poet. Later I was a songwriter. I spent time writing code in web-based programming languages. Intermingled in all of this was the constant desire to write fantasy novels. That was the genre I was going to be known for, and maybe someday that may still be the case. The point is... I no longer limit myself to one specific type of writing, because I just simply enjoy writing.

And so the King of Lights in all his splendor, smiled warmly on his loving subjects, who bowed with a radiant, loving grace and pulled his blue carriage along the highway. The winding road kissed the far-off horizon, which rested dreamily beneath the glittering sky, before it flew off into the great unknown. The Great Unknown waited in anticipation for the little King and his many glorious puzzles.