

WRITING (& life) MASTERY

*A series of Writing Lessons and 'Life Story Work'
based on my long-running Writing Mastery Program*

Liliane Grace

“Creativity is our true nature.” – Julia Cameron

“Why should we use our creative power...? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money.”

– Brenda Ueland

“Losing myself in story is the greatest joy.

I love to follow the first faint images, those barest of whispers, into the fog of the unknown; I love trusting those vague impressions to become more solid and clear as I pursue them. I track the scent of my story until I am fairly rattling along with the pace of it, energised, uplifted, typing like a madwoman, laughing aloud when suddenly I see how all the threads come together and make meaning.

Writing can be ecstasy.”

– Liliane Grace

“Learning to write is not a linear process. There is no logical A-to-B-to-C way to become a good writer. One neat truth about writing cannot answer it all. To do a writing practice means to deal ultimately with your whole life.”

– Natalie Goldberg

“We do not write in order to be understood; we write in order to understand.”

– C Day Lewis

“The very fact that a thing – anything! – can be fitted into a meaning built up of words, small black words, that can be written with one hand and the stub of a pencil, means it is not big enough to be overwhelming. It is the vast, formless, unknown and unknowable things we fear. Anything which can be brought to a common point – a focus within our understanding – can be dealt with.”

– Lara Jefferson

“All suffering is bearable if it is seen as part of a story.”

– Isak Dinesen

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INTRODUCTION

You've signed up for a writing course, but a writing course with a difference. This program will take you on a deep exploration of your life story just as much as it will take you on an exploration of the story-writing genre.

If you've ever struggled with a blank page, you'll soon be learning a useful, practical tool to help those words flow. If you've re-read something you've written and thought, 'That's flat and boring – it could be so much better!', you'll find tips and techniques for making your writing much more impactful.

Equally, if you've ever wished your life was better, if you've ever wondered what went wrong, what happened to those childhood dreams – the successful career, the lover from heaven, the financial freedom, the 'Happy Family', the dream holidays... you'll find some new perspectives and possibilities in this course. If you've ever avoided a social gathering because you were ashamed, you didn't want to be compared with others who had achieved more, whether family members or past classmates at school reunions; if you've ever looked at the cycles of your life and thought, 'Oh no, not this again!', then this e-course is for you.

I've done all of the above. The writer's block and boring writing, yep – and those things have motivated me to discover what facilitates easy-flowing and powerful writing. And the 'life mess' – yes indeed. I've been through broken relationships, stuck relationships, emotionally abusive relationships. I've been jilted, caused break-ups, fantasised about greener grass, and been a shrew. I've had children who swore at me and hit me (even in public); who refused to co-operate (especially in public); who pushed my every button. I've floundered in my own dark

feelings, battling with frustration and shame and anxiety. I've deferred university courses twice only to give up altogether and slink around odd jobs here and there with no clear plan. I've spent thousands on personal development courses only to remain stuck, watch others change, play the endless workshop junkie game – “this book/course/tape/CD/download/-course... this will be the one that changes me!” I've begun my own marketing business only to watch it flounder. I've written stories and articles and even had some published, but the biggie evaded me. Until...

This book is about the 'Until'.

Australian writer Carmel Bird, in her wonderful book about writing called *Dear Writer*, says: “[Students] come to a fiction writing class to write borrowed stories and they find the idea of discovering and exposing their own memories and feelings too much to bear. They seem to me to be thinking: ‘Oh, I wanted to be Agatha Christie or David Malouf; I didn’t want to be me.’”¹

Didn't want to be me. I can relate to that. I wanted to be much more wise, intelligent, successful, skilful, beautiful, desirable... anything but me ‘as I was’. But finally, as I began to piece together the puzzle of my life, every experience, every book I'd read, every story I'd written, every relationship, every course I'd attended, every job, every illness... it all began to form a picture, to communicate a message: a loving, encouraging message.

The purpose of this e-course is to help you make friends with yourself on a deeper level, perhaps even for the first time... and if so, to help you find your self-respect, trust yourself, and recognise the good that *is* in your life right now, because

¹ *Dear Writer* by Carmel Bird, Penguin Books, 1988; p. 9

it's there, waiting to be acknowledged. Paradoxically, as soon as you value your life as it is, things begin to transform.

There's an old saying that what you resist, persists. What wisdom. I consider myself an expert on resistance and resentment. I'll share my story with you as this book unfolds, and I invite you to find where you're resisting the story of *your* life, where there are experiences you're ashamed of, or trying to rip out... I want to help you see that there *is* some good in those horrible, shameful, embarrassing, painful experiences. You just haven't found it yet. When you find it, you're free. *And that's when the magic begins.*

Writing fiction was my first love affair. I was about seven when I first filled an exercise book with an imaginary story, and I was hooked. I discovered that I loved inventing characters and situations; I loved the challenge of writing: to see if I could create a world that was real for the reader. And I loved fiction much more than non-fiction for the exact reason that Carmel Bird identified in her students: I felt that my own life was boring. I wanted to escape into the world of my imagination.

But as I grew older, I discovered that my stories never escaped my own life. Threads and themes that were relevant to me kept emerging in my so-called fiction, and this persistent pattern was what finally led me to recognise that I could use my writing to heal my relationship with myself. So I'm going to share my tips for 'falling in love with your life' in the context of writing. I'm going to take you through the creative writing course I've been teaching and refining since 1987, the theory and the practice, and as you do the exercises, you're going to begin to see your life differently – you're going to write your way to loving your life. But you have to do the exercises. The magic won't happen if you don't.

What do I mean by *'loving your life'*? For me, the word 'love' is synonymous with the word 'appreciate'. I used to ask myself what I meant when I said 'I love you' to my partner or children, and I realised I was saying, 'I enjoy being in your company' and 'I appreciate you'. I'm not talking about a rose-coloured infatuation or a dramatic passion; I'm talking about hitting the true note of a centred, appreciative 'heart' love.

By the way, you don't have to want to *be* a writer. You may well discover the pleasure of writing for its own sake along the way, but the purpose here is to use writing as a tool for coming to a place of love and appreciation for yourself and your life journey.

Nor do you have to worry about being a *good* writer – your writing skills will improve as you do the exercises, effortlessly, naturally. (And definitely don't worry about your spelling or punctuation. Some really great writers have never been good at spelling – their editors take care of that.) The more honest you allow yourself to be, the more you will come to appreciate your life, yourself, your story - and the more powerful your writing will become.

For those who *do* want to be writers – and good ones – you will gain both the appreciation of yourself and the skills mentioned above, and you will discover another element to the process of writing that will nourish you forever. Let's begin!

Liliane Grace



DEDICATION

For my writing students, past, present and future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to all the writers who have gone before me, and educated, moved, and inspired me. Those I have formally recognised in this book are listed in the Endnotes.