

Nourishing Dreams

by Anna Alexander

The best things about writing this column, besides meeting some interesting people, are the suggestions and recommendations I get for interviews. My hair stylist recommended his drag-queen/massage therapist friend, the publisher I work for recommend a few interesting and zany friends. Writing *Nourishing Dreams* each month made **me** take inventory of my friends and I realized I have a wealth of creative friends who specialize in many different medium. Artists, musicians, painters, writers.

This month's interview, Jennifer Hemphill Tatroe, was a suggestion from a good friend and I'm so glad to I got "meet" her. Jennifer specializes in mix-media collages and is also a poet and writer of flash fiction. In her spare time, Jen belly dances and shamelessly plays Dungeons & Dragons at least once a week. For more information on her click on:

<http://www.jennifertatroe.com/>



The Guardian got inspired by Elmore Leonard's 10 Rules of Writing and asked prominent authors like Neil Gaiman and Margaret Atwood their advice on the writing do's and don'ts. What is your Top 5 List?

1. Start anywhere. You can always change it later and sometimes you waste so much energy looking for the right starting place that you never get around to actually writing.
2. Remember that other people don't live inside your head. This means two things. First, you have to write clearly if you want others to understand you. And second, there are things that seem quite prosaic to you, but will surprise and delight people who don't spend every day thinking your thoughts.
3. Eavesdrop. You can't develop an ear for language if you don't listen to it.
4. Give yourself writerly moments. Sit in a coffee shop with your laptop. Take your notebook to a quiet bench at the park. Seclude yourself in the deepest corner of the library. You may find you don't get any writing done when you do these things, but it makes you feel legitimate and

that feeling can carry you through when you're struggling to type a few words while the baby naps or in the five minutes before you have to leave for work in the morning.

5. Get rejected. If you're not opening yourself up for rejection, you're not aiming high enough.

On your bio you say, "Even though words flow through my veins, I am catholic in my hobbies." What do you mean by that?

I've always been a writer and that will never change, but when it comes to hobbies I enjoy doing a wide variety of things and it doesn't matter if I'm talented at them or not. No matter how hard I try, I'll probably never step into a writing class with a wide open mind again, but can practice that openness and willingness to learn by trying new things. I've played on volleyball teams, performed in a belly dance troupe, and run several 5k races. I garden. I play Dungeons & Dragons. I teach art to kids. I tried knitting for a while, but some hobbies stick better than others.



I was reading your blog and you wrote "I always wrinkle my nose a little when I read someone's biography and they call themselves a "writer and artist" or something similar. If you're a writer and an artist, I think, you're probably not especially good at either. Pick a side, I think." Really? We can't be both a model and an actress?

Our society really doesn't embrace the "Renaissance man" and, especially in an Olympics year like this one, we're constantly being bombarded with the idea that we should strive to be the absolute best at what we do. I am slowly learning to embrace the idea that "what I do" is actually a little bit of a lot of different things and that's okay.



Your mixed media collages are such an interesting blend of new and old materials – playing card with lace – what inspires you and how did you start working in this medium?

I love libraries and museums, but I hate staying behind the red ropes and looking at documents under glass. It's ironic that what we need to do to preserve history prevents most of us from really experiencing it. The first collages I did were for a party we held eight or nine years ago. I got my hands on some Western Union telegraph blanks from the 1930s and made them into invitations. I loved the idea of holding not just a reproduction of a 70-year-old telegram, but the actual item. It turns out there's all kinds of ephemera out there that's not deemed "important" enough for historical preservation, but still carries an amazing sense of the past. I try to use that in combination with the modern objects that will occupy that same space in the future to create pieces of art that beg to be touched.

Everyone who gets writer's block or struggles to create on a deadline is looking for the magical elixir to help them get through this. Is it really "Butt in chair, fingers on keyboard" ?

Honestly? Yes. It also helps if you use that keyboard to write instead of to post on Twitter or play video games. Not that I'd know anything about that.

What is it about flash fiction that appeals to you? Lack of rules? The challenge of condensing a story? Explain.

I really believe that every single moment holds a story. Flash fiction forces us to recognize that fact and find the magic in all our experience converging on an instant. In that way, I think it can be just as powerful as much longer fiction.



What is the best advice you've received?

Someone once told me, "Things always work out in the end." I remind myself of that often. I will get where I'm going and it will be where I was supposed to end up, no matter what.