
Crossing Paths



Sometimes there are people who cross paths with us, and it takes a little time to figure out the big picture of just why they do. Often the big picture becomes unpretty. When it becomes clear that these two people are not good for each other for whatever reason, it is not always a thing to be regretted. I firmly believe that we can choose to see it as a valuable lesson, an enrichment of ourselves on many levels.

Some people are not meant to share any kind of path, but only to cross for a brief moment and continue the journey individually. We can feel wronged by this; we can feel cheated, frustrated. We can suffer the sandpaper of anger when the eventual truth blooms in our minds that this is not to be a journey shared. It's easy to allow this kind of discord to escalate until words become caustic, biting rapiers of injury. When that happens, it is often easier to hide behind that anger so we can mask the sadness of it. If we instead try to sever the ties with as much simplicity and kindness as we can muster, it is always best—but not always easiest. When we let go of our need to defend and accuse and beat the proverbial dead horse, we are left with just the compassion that one or both people are hurting. And the anger doesn't save us from that. We have to feel it and still know that it was the honorable thing to do, even if it leaves us with a cloying sadness.

To All The Girls I've Loved Before



I had this nightmare once, where I walked into a social gathering, and every woman I had ever slept with was there. They all turned in unison upon my arrival, with a varied collection of expressions and responses, and at that moment, I felt as if I would swallow my own teeth. It's not as if I had a horrible track record, or made any real enemies of these women, but the concept was overwhelming in that I had urgent questions that needed answering:

1. Was this a joke?
2. If it was a joke, was I expected to laugh?
3. Had these women all been comparing notes?
4. Was I really dead, and this was my life review?
5. How much alcohol was available to me in that room?

Now, while I am reasonably certain that should this event actually take place, I would have the social grace to handle it, I wonder if I would instead spin on my heel and dash back outside?

I woke up fully prepared to make a few calls and offer any required apologies. . .

Slings and Arrows



Recently, I was offered a publishing contract on my novel, **Achilles Forjan**. I allowed myself to get all excited and when the hard copy of the contract came, I realized it was not the same as the "sample." I didn't like the idea of handing over the rights to my own book for SEVEN years. I didn't know this publisher well enough to entrust my work for such a long time.

And then there was being at the mercy of their idea of what my work was, what it should look like, how it should be edited, and then how I'd get 10-15 percent of the profit on each book. The book I SLAVED over. The book that came from my guts. The one that cost me several years of my creative life. That book that is a piece of me as surely as if I had given birth to it. It was one of my literary children.

And this deal would include very little, if any, marketing efforts on their part. Those perks are reserved for the cash cows like Dean Koontz and Nora Roberts. Rightfully so, as they have proven their profit viability in the marketplace. I'd still have to do the interviews, the book signings, the business cards, the web page. . .

There were other things that just didn't feel right, too. My gut told me to refuse the contract. I always listen to my gut. It wasn't a pleasant decision, though. Making a decision like that is sort of like being pecked to death by chickens. How long had I waited for an opportunity like this?

For years, I have intentionally avoided pitching my material because I wanted to feel like it was worthy

enough to compete. Now that I feel I am a good enough writer to publish my work, I'm faced with the usual slings and arrows a writer faces when trying to make it to print. There are so many talented writers out there, but most of them don't get into the right door, largely because of the politics of the publishing industry.

The advent of self-publishing has offered control back to the creator. (I don't mean God, I mean the writer . . . writing is, metaphorically speaking, quite like playing God. . . but that's for another blog). Now if we could only get past the stigma of it all. The stigma that says if you have to publish your own work, it must suck. That is sometimes true. But in many other cases, it is not. James Redfield (*Celestine Prophecy*) self-published first. So did John Grisham (he sold copies of *A Time to Kill* from the trunk of his car), as did Deepak Chopra, Mark Twain, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Edgar Allen Poe, Benjamin Franklin, Stephen Crane, Beatrix Potter, Margaret Atwood, Amanda Brown (*Legally Blonde*). It's a great way to test market, and often, self-published books get picked up by traditional publishing houses. So stigma be damned.

I began the task of being my own publisher. Then a funny thing happened. I fell in love with the process. I discovered a formidable affection for being in control of the editing, typography, formatting, design of my own work. And I resolved to get all my completed or nearly-completed work in print and continue to do that with forthcoming material. This has translated into 100 hour weeks. But I am loving it. I feel permeated by satisfaction. It's always been about getting my work out there, not getting rich off it. I'm not delusional. Having come close again to being sucked into the literary abyss of greed, and allowing my work to be corrupted, pigeon-

holed, and packaged by strangers who take most of the profit, I managed to pull myself back, regain my footing. *I can do this myself.*

So. The self-published copies will be used to fish for a literary agent. It's cheaper that way anyway. There's a reason why writers are historically poor, downtrodden, and half-insane addicts. It's because it's so hard and so expensive to get their work noticed. These days, it's still expensive. It costs upwards of \$40 to send a manuscript to just ONE publisher or agent, when you include paper, ink, copying, postage, etc. One inkjet cartridge, for example, costs me \$35 of that, and it takes one whole ink cartridge to print an average manuscript in good quality. So the point is, it's more economical for me to use an online printing service, buy a copy of it for \$4 to \$15 and mail that. That's if the agent will allow it. They still have some stodgy ideas, too.

In the old days, before computers, the craft of writing was even more arduous and tedious and time consuming. Imagine hand-writing a 300-400 page manuscript and then spilling your coffee on it. Imagine typing the same amount, and then realizing you have to do a major rewrite, and that means typing it all again. And you could spill your coffee on that, too.

My best friend, who is also a writer, used a typewriter up until 5 years ago. She had turned over six of her manuscripts to her new agent, and he was in such a hurry to get to New York for his meetings, that he didn't make copies of them. Then POOF. Something weird happened; he had some sort of mental breakdown, or was abducted by aliens, or otherwise fell off the face of the earth, and she never could find him after that. Imagine. Six full novels. Gone. She's been flirting with rewriting them for the last four years, and has done

some of it, along with new material, but you never quite get over something like that. It's like having someone rip out your spleen. With a butter knife.

I will continue this quest, and if, along the way, some agent or publisher sees my work and deems it suitable for representation and then negotiates a lucrative and satisfying alliance that will bring us both joy and a plethora of meaningless material possessions, I'll seriously consider it.

In the meantime, it's still about the WRITING..

A Little Healthy Sarcasm



What with all the affirmations and mantras and positive self talk going on, it's obvious that we're trying to work with our minds in a way that will benefit us. But it's crucial to understand the differences in the conscious and subconscious mind. The conscious mind makes decisions, filters information, and understands irony, sarcasm, implication and morality concepts. The subconscious mind, however, does not. If you have concerns about being overweight, you might look in the mirror and want to say "Moouoooo!" But there are ways to get your subconscious mind to help you out. Your subconscious mind does not know the difference between statements like "I am fat" and "I am not fat." All it knows is I and FAT. Since the subconscious mind does not understand sarcasm, it's a relatively easy task to simply change the way you make those statements about yourself. Use sarcasm. Instead, say "Wow, I am PENCIL thin." Your subconscious will think "I, Thin," even though you were being sarcastic. And then it will begin to do whatever it takes to make that happen.

Therefore, I contend, sarcasm is healthy. So all of you who say, "I hate sarcasm," you're not only telling your subconscious mind that you are sarcastic, you're also just missing a great opportunity to reprogram your entire life, while getting a good laugh.