

Live to Write Another Day

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

Writers, Depression, and Suicide

Another writer died by her own hand, just two days ago. I got the news this morning. I cannot say I knew her – to the best of my knowledge, we never met, or exchanged e-mails, though certainly at one point or another we may have. I did not know her. But she was, nonetheless, my sister, and one of my tribe.

And she fell, as so many in my tribe fall.

Psychologists note that writers suffer from a higher-than-normal incidence of depression, that the same qualities that make us writers tend to make us more sensitive to the ups and downs of daily life. I do not know in how many cases this is true, but I know it's true for me. I have faced the abyss of self-destruction once, when things were very bad, but managed to walk away. I've suffered from serious depression on a couple of other occasions, also from situations and events that were unbearable, and unfixable.

I count myself lucky to have gotten this far. Now that I'm here, though, I intend to stay. Because along the way, I've discovered that everything changes, and that no matter how horrible things are, they are not horrible forever. Every moment you're breathing is an opportunity to change. If not your surroundings, your trials, your sufferings, then yourself.

From someone who has found a way to hang on even when things are terrible, I want to pass on to you what I've found. Because my tribe has lost enough voices and enough magic, too

soon and needlessly. Don't let it lose yours.

First, if you need help, for God's sake tell someone. Don't suffer in silence while the walls close in. Tell a friend, tell a doctor, tell your favorite shaman – just tell someone. Furthermore, tell this person the truth. Exactly HOW bad things are. What you need to make them better. What you're thinking of doing. I know this is harder for men than it is for women – but while suffering in silence may be noble, if you end up killing yourself because of it, it's stupid. There are some things on this planet worth dying for, but an inability to pay off your fucking MasterCard is not one of them. Neither is the fact that he or she left you for some bimbo. Or that no one understands you. Or the fact that nothing is selling.

You're a writer. You have options. Write about the bastard who left, and the bimbo, and sacrifice both of them in your next book. Let the bastard pay for the MasterCard while showing the world what a shit he or she was. Change your pen name and give yourself a fresh writing start. Get a crap-ass part-time job to get you through the low spots. Do something to change things, not to end them.

Second, start giving thanks for everything in your life that is good. Every day. Start today, so this is a habit for you if things are not desperate right now. Because if you're a writer, you'll hit a point where they get bad. And then they'll get better, but only if you hang on. Start right now to build the patterns that will help you hang on. I'm not Christian; I'm more of a struggling Taoist (an oxymoron if ever there was one) than anything else. I cannot define God, nor do I choose to try to, but I know that there is something in the universe that is bigger than me, if only the universe itself. I did not, after all, create myself, or give myself life. So I give thanks each day for everything in my life that I can think of that is good, to whatever force it was that brought me into being. This thing I do is a form of prayer-in-

motion, I suppose, but if you're opposed to prayer, call it moving meditation. I face the sunrise each morning before I get to work and breathe in and out deeply and do gentle stretches and while I do, I say my thank-yous. For breathing. For the people who love me. For the work I get to do. For the opportunity to make something better for someone else today. For the smell of fresh-mown grass, if that happens to be coming through the window. For anything I can think of that is good in my life.

I do not ask for anything. Do not complain about anything. No matter what might be wrong in my life, this is a time I set aside simply to give thanks for anything that is right. There have been a couple of times when my thanks list was pretty short. But I made it through those times, as I intend to make it through similar times that lie ahead. Because as long as you focus on the darkness, all you'll see is the darkness; the most important thing you can do for yourself when you're curled up down in the hole in the dark all alone is realize that if you just look up and open your eyes, you can see the sun. And other people. You still have a couple of things going for you. You are, at the very least, still breathing. And so long as you are still breathing, you can affect your world, effect change, save your own life, make a difference for someone else, make things better.

Live to write another day. For yourself. For the rest of your tribe. For all the good you can do.

(This article is written with thanks and deepest gratitude to all the writers who faced the abyss and found the strength to walk away.)

NOTE: If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a

friendly, supportive environment, come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community.

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