

## Las Vegas Quills Mini Lesson 2: Be the Writer You Are

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This week, I have in my hand no less than 43 books on "how to be a successful writer and make a gazillion dollars". Okay, there really isn't a title like that in the pile, but you get the idea.

Writing for most of us is not about supporting our families, or paying off those student loans. Writing is about reaching the core of who we are, and sharing that in the hope of finding others who identify with that inner truth. Writers are in constant search of others in their clan who accept the way we think, or the way we explain our thoughts. Writers are part of the very few professions where lies can be truth, and where fantasy can be reality.

The lesson this week is simple. Be the writer you are. That's the most difficult process, but when you get to THAT part of you, all of the work in doing things the right way becomes secondary to doing things in the most honest way. The lesson comes from an email sent to me from a young man who loves writing about World War II Nazi hunters. I read through five of his essays and the same thing kept coming up... this boy was deeply ashamed of his German heritage, and constantly berated all things Germanic.

After corresponding back and forth a bit, it was clear his talent wasn't in creating Ludlum like espionage tales, but in expressing the historical facts in such a way that the driest subject, (for example, easel building in Munich), took me into amazing spins and turns. His true talent came through in the way he hid the great things Germanic history has brought to current culture. But, none of his essays pointed any of this out. I had to learn of his talent by asking why he hated his family so much.

When I told him to read the letters he sent me, he was frustrated. His anger was growing the more I pointed out how brilliant his own great-grandfather was in his invention of a specific type of fishing reel. All he could see was the, and I quote here, so you get what I'm saying, "...That archaic thought system led him to only pursue the trivial. Fishing? His reel ended up as part of a weapons system, used in building bullet systems."

I sent him back four paragraphs. The sentences were only those he had used in the first essay. He read it and asked me how I knew so much about the small town his grandfather's family was from. He didn't understand how I could have known about the bakeries, or the small woman who did needlepoint portraits of

her patrons. It was then he got it. He had hidden his love for all things of history in his hatred of all things Nazi. His talents weren't in intricate spy stories, but in the discoveries of the beauty that existed despite all the terrors of the war that changed the world. He got it.

Last night I got another email from him. He just sold a book about the lost villages of Germany and Italy. The book follows four families and generations up until that war. He said the publisher liked it so much, they've asked him for two follow-up books. Unheard of for a first time novelist, he was just stunned. I wasn't. This was the story he was trying to tell the entire time, but wouldn't accept it.

What story are YOU trying to tell? Where does the core of your writing live? Do you turn everything into a comical lyric? Do your funny tales of your childhood cause others to raise the hair off the back of their necks? Do you really understand what your words are accomplishing?

In this lesson, there is only one exercise--but it reaches for your core:

Read something you wrote as a child, as a teen, as a young woman, and something you wrote most recently. (OR--Any four items from any four different times of your life) As yourself the following:

1. Do you use the same voice as you did as a child?
2. Can you rewrite any of the stories to reflect who you are today?
3. Are you using the same characters?
4. Where do your stories live? In a building? In someone's thoughts? In a famous location?
5. If you were to talk to your favorite character, would you feel like he or she was a friend?