

I wrote it on the thick, elementary-lined paper with the top-half blank (for illustrations). I titled my story “Cinderbunny” with all the creativity of a 3rd grader, and I drew the evil step-mother bunny with spiky purple curlers in her hair. I told my teacher to write on my “When You Grow Up” paper that I wanted to be an author. And then, for a while, I forgot about it.

I wrote three haikus in 6th grade. The loft computer lab was muggy. I wondered if the stairs were entirely safe.

Mrs. Malouf published a collection of memoirs from our 8th grade English class. I wrote about the time my brother and I built a fort out of cornstalks. I remember asking Mrs. Malouf if it was okay to write about something I didn’t actually remember doing—at least not the way I was writing it. I felt deceitful for making parts of my story up. She didn’t understand my concern. I didn’t understand why she wasn’t concerned. When the collection was published, I thought my story was the best in the whole book.

Writing is fascinating, because I haven’t figured out how to do it yet. There are moments when it seems I’ve got it figured out, moments when the words and I flow together, and what I want to say is said. But then I come to something new and see that I have so much to learn. Writing takes effort, and every time I begin to think otherwise, I am swiftly reminded that, as great as my love for the sport becomes, it

may never really be easy. There’s always more to learn. I started with simply placing one word next to another, and then I felt the power of a well-written sentence. And so the struggle began. If I don’t let the words free, I am strangled by my own control. If I don’t hold them back, I get lost in my own freedom.

When I was thirteen I started writing a story that took three years of work, in part because of an electrical fire inside my parents’ computer that forced me to start over. I don’t even remember why I started the two-hundred pages I finished three years later. Maybe I was feeling too old for my toys, but too young to give up the stories I had always made up. My imagination needed somewhere to fly to, and the computer in the unfinished basement was sufficient. An old painting of flowers, (they were lilies) hung on the single slab of sheetrock on the left wall. Everywhere else was bare studs and cement.

Words are a voice. In the moments when I find the balance between control and freedom, they pour out of me in a string of symbols, sounds, sentences. I have the power to teach someone something they never would have thought of themselves. With this power comes the obligation to write what I believe. I have the responsibility to use my writing to help people, to teach, inspire; donate my experiences. It’s not that I feel I have great wisdom or that I know more than any other person. Because I don’t. I simply realize there are things people need to

learn, things we, as humans, are to understand, that we cannot experience on our own; we have to learn to share.

I once saw a photograph of a breathtaking mountain sunrise. I stared at the vibrant colors and the beauty of the pristine mountain lake reflecting the morning light. I admired it for nearly ten minutes before I realized that there was a man in the corner of the picture. He was holding binoculars to his face. And yet, he was looking away from the sunrise. I first asked myself why he was missing the sunrise. The image was stunning, and he was looking the wrong way! It didn't take long, however, for me to ask myself what I was missing. Because we are only human, we can see only what we see. We lose the opportunity for everything else. What could this man see? The question intrigued me until I was nearly mad with curiosity. So I'll tell this man with the rust-orange sweater and binoculars about the sunrise and the lake, and he'll tell me the rest.

How else would I learn about humanity and suffering than from reading the memory and words of a Victor Hugo? I did not live during the French Revolution. I never knew Bonaparte. Except through writing. Complacency is dispelled through the words which penetrate the pages and the black ink that smudges on my thumbs.

Writing is dangerous business. Victor Hugo is counting on our trust, for he knows that we

can only trust his words or choose to discard them. But neither of those activities will erase what has been written.

Like Hugo, I have to trust you, for you may either believe what I have written or not. Like it, or hate it. But nothing will change the fact that I have placed a part of myself on the paper, and I hold on to the hope that someone, somewhere, will be able to use what I write for good.

And so, despite the inadequacies of the words, despite the frustration of not being able to perfectly communicate everything I feel, I continue to write. From "Cinderbunny" to this very sentence I now write, I have and continue to believe in the power of language. I have much to learn. The challenge is exciting.