

## Generating Poetry

My friend Ernie, himself a talented writer and published author, recently read my small collection of poems. He posed a deceptively simple question, "How do you generate poetry?"

At first, no answer appeared beyond "It just comes to me." Upon reflection, a more instructive response emerges.

Ernie's question recalled the title of a book discovered in my hippie youth, "*Don't Push the River: It Flows by Itself*." That title firmly planted itself in my young mind as an enduring theme in my way of being in the world: I find greater success by **allowing** things to happen, rather than attempting to **force** them to happen (think elusive sleep, stubborn constipation, and reluctant orgasms). My career in mediation, my practice-theory of how mediation achieves consensus between warring disputants, is, I now recognize, a manifestation of that principle.

So, how does the principle of not pushing the river play out in how I, as an amateur poet, generate poetry?

In the preface to this collection of poems, haiku, and soliloquies, I describe my typical process, abridged here:

Most evenings at dusk, I sit at our west window watching the daily "sunset movie," headphones in place, listening to music chosen to suit my mood, a glass of decent cabernet near at hand.

Immersed in this multi-dimensional beauty, I watch my mind, curious to see where it goes and what it does, undirected by purposeful intent, often revealing what has been lurking in the background of my awareness.

While lingering in this altered mental state, my muse sometimes drops in for a visit. She suggests artful words to convey

an emerging idea or sentiment. I focus her attention on that idea for a while, hoping to nurture those artful words and capture them before they drift off into the sunset, out of my memory, lost forever.

As an instruction manual for this process, I offer:

1. Prepare conditions conducive to creativity (wine optional, but a helpful lubricant, I find).
2. Set aside distractions. Have no particular goal or purpose. Get physically comfortable. Solitude helps.
3. Immerse your senses (sight, sound) in the natural beauty around you.
4. Patiently allow time to pass unhurried in this relaxed yet attentive mental state.
5. Observe your wandering mind with curiosity. Follow it where it leads.
6. Await your muse. She may appear; maybe not. Accept her choice without resistance or struggle.
7. If she appears, join in shaping her inventive offerings into artful words.
8. Arise to record and cultivate those seedlings while your muse remains nearby to nourish your creative energy.
9. Read, reread, and tweak your creation for minutes, hours, days, and weeks. A thesaurus helps find that perfect word.
10. Share with willing friends, as desired.

Those familiar with certain types of meditation will recognize similarities:

1. Mindful relaxation
2. Use of a mantra to refocus the restless mind (here, returning to the sensory beauty around you serves as a mantra)
3. Resting patiently in a purposeless state

Don't push the river; it flows by itself.

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