

WHY DO I WRITE: Because maybe they're right

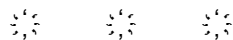
She lied prone in the bed, moving slowly, tossing side to side. Health care professionals of different ilk moved on the perimeter, peeking into the different rooms, even though technically everyone was in the same room; separated by social graces and curtains drawn around each bed. Others like her – like me – standing, prone, moving from level to another. I was sleepy, like her, unlike her, hers medication induced. Watching, nodding, failing woefully the assigned task, watching for change – waiting - wondering whether it was permissible to retrieve a tissue and wipe a visible line of drool - slowed when her head moved side to side - the left edge, weaving a zigzagged line to the middle of the chin. I stayed anchored to the chair, sorting thoughts, not clear on what to do. I tried to recount the instructions, while tracking and calculating time. I was tempted to text others. There was no need - nothing else was scheduled.

“Is she okay...?”

“Seems she is awakening...”

A health care professional deftly navigated the small space; touching, observing, wiping. “She is almost back, another ten minutes. Do you have any questions?”

I pretended I didn't. I nodded politely instead. I didn't want to be invisible; this too an impossibility because of the space - sitting, standing, lying within one-two-three of each other.



I started playing basketball in the third grade, on sandlot courts, small patches of dirt and grass, most were compacted, Texas gumbo soil; compacted over time by the constant movement of feet, pounding balls, explained another way - a known geological event created by violent movement, causing sliding, and shifting of tectonic plates, done over time, day in and day out.



Riding bicycles, walking, running to visit other courts in the neighborhood – behind houses, the schoolhouse, one, two were located on the edge of the street; a rim tacked to a tree, leaning left/right permitting a clean shot at the some angles, not all. Perfecting the ability to dribble without looking, with either hand; walking the ball, now people walk their dogs instead, looking here, there - every day - pat, pat, pat. All the games were outside, hand-eye based, dribbling competitions – racing from this point to that – with the ball spinning and leading the way; perfecting ones skill level by doing a repetitive act, over and over again, the ball ultimately becoming a comfortable extension of the body. A the day of rest, always - after church - peering into a small square box watching professional basketball teams on the American Broadcast Company (ABC), forever marveling at their efficiency. A generation before basketball camps was the time.

There was no [AAU](#) basketball. Basketball was not a worldwide sport whose professional members are able to earn untold sums. Rooting against Bill Russell and his invincible Celtics meant I suffered repetitive bouts of childhood depression, praying to the basketball gods for the Philadelphia 76ers - Wilt Chamberlain, Hal Greer, Wali Jones, Billy Cunningham, Chet Walker and Luke Jackson (the team's top six players) – to cast off the obnoxious demons residing in Boston Garden - bounce, bounce, bounce. Mimicking rituals, facial expressions, movements; increasing the work; wishing - aiming for the same perfection. Imitating game winning shots, increasing the number of free throws made consecutively. What I could do with my left hand, I was able to do with my right.

Reading autobiographies of the greats, admiring Bill Russell's civil rights advocacy, religiously sitting in place on Sunday meant I was both student and fan of the game. Doing the same thing over and over was not insanity in my mind - getting the same results didn't mean

failure - it was actually the daily applicable of basic principles of the game – waiting for the worm to turn, so I believed, I still believed - practice, practice, practice.

Recently, I watched a New York Times Op-Docs [[From Here to Home](#): Five films about immigration and belonging]. One of the shorts - [Stay Close](#) – was about the American fencer named, Keeth Smart. He – Keeth - chuckled initially, a laugh followed when he admitted his sister, Erinn, was a prodigy. He was not. His parents dragged him into the sport. He soon became the punching bag for the fencing club, day after day, year after year. His parents didn't permit his to accept mediocrity. They insisted on more. He laughed again when retelling their words, expressing incredulity at their seeing the possible. Smart ultimately admitted listening to their voice, doubly down, practicing harder than ever, deciding to make every contest a war. After being diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia, with the Olympics approaching, Smart remained committed, “for the next two months, I trained like I had never trained before in my life.” [Both Smarts – Keeth and his sister Erinn - earned silver medals](#) in the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Smart was the first American fencer who was ranked number one in the world. He dedicated this achievement to his deceased parents' perseverance and belief in their children, to him they are forever alive and present.

Some of the world's greatest speakers, writers, artists have given the same speech, written the same story, and painted a variation of the same picture hundreds and hundreds of times. Writing the same line, over and over again until they didn't; changing a line here and there, practicing pitch, tone, color, converting their craft into an art form. Ignoring the voices of critics and fans, listening instead to an inner, wayward voice which drives them onto seen and unseen roads, causes them venture down unpredictable paths, a voice which reminds them their field is no different than others – of course, practice, practice, practice. Seeking perfection,

disbelieving the oft-repeated lie and definition of insanity- [“Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again expecting the different results”](#) – a statement purportedly said by [Albert Einstein](#). I will play stupid for a moment and assume Einstein made the oft-quoted statement; whether he did or didn't the assessment even wrong on a scientific level.

Scientists are required to test - over and over again - to assure the hypothesis and theorems are correct. To do otherwise is not science and is no different the idiots who point to a brief heat, snow, rainfall respite to make their point, “there is no climate change” – this too an oft-stated lie.

This application of Einstein alleged statement is also fundamentally false in the art world. Artists repeat the same act repeatedly, until he/she/they don't. Practicing, practicing, practicing, honing unrefined skills until those skills rise to the level of art, while the voices of disdain and disbelieve encourage them to stop; coupled with the constant reference to the artist's errant behavior as an obsession – insaneness - when it is not.

Pointing to the sky, a Chicken Little persona, telling the writer to ”read others works, to see good writing”, “mimic her/him/my favorite authors”, while turning away with a self-assured smirk in place, seeing in the person, not a writer, but an uneducated, unprepared fool. This unprepared fool believes she has a story to tell – sometimes the same story - over and over again; adding context, color, depth, never leaving the story, refusing to quit, making mistakes – intentional, unintentional - until she sees the path forward.

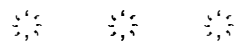
The unprepared fool is the baker who rejects the criticism of having a simple palate, not because she is insane, but because she is possessed with the belief she has to perfect the basics before changing, adapting, modifying, so she can learn how to adapt and move her beloved



profession to an art form (crumb and texture lives matter too); rejecting others visions, refusing to make their vision her own. Isn't that fundamentally the definition of art?

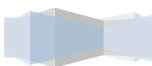
He is the person who practices the same song over and over again, until the piano practically plays itself; knowing where every key is, hearing sounds other do not hear; playing complex melodies in his head, a possessed personality, but clearly not one insane. In times of reflection and solitude, he still hears those voices, somehow, for some reason he remembers the count – the number of times he was told to stop, do something else.

I would contend this is how art is made. The art of writing is no different. Why Do I Write? I write because I am imperfect, seeking to convert a craft to an art-form. Writing around life's disappointments, achievements, happiness, depression, fighting against what others think of me, of my writings. Naysayers pointing to the sky - with crooked fingers – speaking with forked tongues, directing one in a different, preferred direction, sometimes say nicely, other times in harsh tones.



The health care professional's prediction was right. Ten minutes on the dot – science you say? When my friend awoke, the doctor moved into the room – on cue – and told her what the testing showed, asked her whether she had any questions. The fog was no more. She no longer drooled. Her eyes were clear.

Looking up – down - pausing for a moment to permit his patient not ask a question but tell him what she had read on the internet. She didn't possess a medical degree. She was no more qualified to cast a diagnosis than I. The doctor looked as if he had heard the same question/statement/Internet opinion before. He frowned was hidden under a placid face, barely



perceptible. He didn't scream. He didn't call her a fool. He looked at me. I looked at him - then her.

“She has no questions...”

“But I do,” she exclaimed.

“Not from an Internet diagnosis you don't...!”

Was my behavior rude? Yes it was, particularly in light of my unwillingness to intercede and wipe. Stepping on her statement in hindsight was an invasion in the doctor's relationship with his patient. I was there to do the favor, sit in place, remain quiet, wait and drive the patient back home at the anointed time.

The doctor was better than I – patient, listening, while typing on a computer, saying much the same as I, only more professional. He never answered his patient's question. Maybe she wasn't fully back? The doctor turned to me, handed me the prescription. “You are driving, right? She may be a little cloudy the rest of the day. Will you monitor her for the next three to four hours? If there is a problem, give me a call.”

I was able to do so – drive back. I did do so - monitor. Over the ensuing hours, I never apologize for my rudeness, for hushing the prepared speech. Drugged or not, she was going to tell him what she read. Her internet-related conclusions were contrary to the doctor's professional diagnosis – she didn't care.

“How about asking him questions fact-based and see if the diagnosis is supported...?”

She didn't answer my question. She sat in place stewing, insisting she had the new internet-spewed condition. She never saw what I saw; the same as me never apologizing for listening to a different voice, than the voices of naysayers. I write because I can't blame the



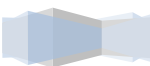
naysayers. Neither can I blame the errant patient. She had every right to disagree with my unanticipated interference – as does the naysayers.

[Tiffany Haddish](#), the comic, surmises she is an expert in a number of areas – plumber, electrician, mechanic, air condition technician, surgeon – all attributable to YouTube. Good joke which serves as an astute observation of our new disease - believing with a little bit of dangerous knowledge, we can do anything - doctor, lawyer, engineer, writer, trim carpenters - ignoring the years and years of schooling and dedication to a craft/profession/skill. The schooling and practice are known variables, permitting the practitioner to move in a straight line, not the circuitous route crafted by our YouTube friends, strangers and unknown sponsors.

There is another reason I can't blame the naysayers. They are reflecting a societal belief – expressing doubt, telling of their superiority, others acclaim, admitting what they are accustomed to seeing, reading, believing never really sure what to make of the persistence. Strange animal am I – indeed - this I can't disagree.

An internet search is helpful. American's greatest writers...? There is one site in which the [20 Best American Writers](#) are identified. The only person who looks like me on the list was the black female writer Toni Morrison. She was the one – one out of twenty - for a percentage ratio of 5%. No black male writers - none.

Another site [The Great American Read: Introducing The Great American Read and 100 Best-Loved Novels](#) is just as helpful in explaining why doubt remains part of any observation. The top novel - [To Kill a Mockingbird](#) - authored by a white female author – Harper Lee, who passed from this earth on [February 19, 2016](#). [To Kill and Mockingbird](#) has sold over forty million copies and a fictitious tale of a white lawyer defending an unjustly accused black man. The remainder ninety-nine (99) novels...?



There are ten (10) out of one hundred (100) books which are authored by black authors. This represents ten percent (10%) of the total; using African American males as the comparator - three (3) out of one-hundred (100); this is an easier calculation, even for one reared and educated in an apartheid South – three percent (3%) of the total, of which two (2) of the three (3) are dead.

The ten black authors:

#27 – [Color Purple](#) by Alice Walker, who is still living; #41 – [The Count of Monte Cristo](#) by Alexander Dumas, author from the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti); [Alexander Dumas](#) is no longer living. He passed on December 5, 1870; #51 – [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) – Zora Neale Hurston, a black female writer who passed [January 28, 1960](#); #60, [Beloved](#) by Toni Morrison, a black female writer who died on [August 5, 2019](#); #72, [Invisible Man](#) by Ralph Ellison, a black male writer who died on [April 16, 1994](#); #82, [Things Fall Apart](#) by black male (Nigerian) author [Chinua Achebe](#). Mr. Achebe died on March 21, 2013; #89, [Americanah](#) by a black female (Nigerian) author [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#), she is still alive; #90, [Another Country](#) by James Baldwin, a black male writer, who died on [December 1, 1987](#); #96, [White Teeth](#) by Zadie Smith, a black female (British) writer; the author is still alive; #98; [The Coldest Winter Ever](#) by [Sister Souljah](#), a black female writer; #99, [The Intuitionist](#), by Colson Whitehead is still living, he is a black male.

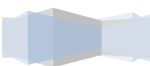
On the list of Great American Reads is a book which comes in at #19, [And Then There Were None](#), which had an original title, [Ten Little Niggers](#). The author is Agatha Christie, white female. The book was published in 1939, and is heralded as Christie's best-selling novel (selling over 100 million copies worldwide). The book was retitled in 1940 – [And Then There Were None](#) and retitled again in 1964 to – [Ten Little Indians](#). Does race really matters?

Also on the list of Great American Reads is [The Help](#), coming in at #16, a story based in the American south. American author, Kathryn Stockett, a white female, crafted a fictional tale of black female domestic workers in white households in Jackson, Mississippi, during the early 1960s. The book has sold seven million copies. The book is nothing more than a variation of a theme in American literature. Revolt you say – no, no, silly you ... [Nat Turner](#) revolted. The story was written by [Harriet Beecher Stowe](#), a white female author.

Some will never understand the anguish by people of color with regards to the pattern. The tale told in Green Book, the movie, is a prime example. [White male screenwriter/authors](#) were permitted to craft the familiar culture tale – even with their tainted eyes – and ignore the [historical origin](#) of the story, crafting the story in a form permissible in their eyes. Good storytelling need not always be a preferred-color lie. Good writing should not always be judged in the same light

Also on the list is the book [Gilead](#) (#84) written by Marilyn Robinson, a white female author.

[Less obtrusive but also a constant theme in the novel, as it is in American life, is race. Ames's grandfather is formed by the abolitionist vision; the Iowa town of Gilead was a stop on the Underground Railroad \(Ames's recounting of pieces of that history provides the novel with some comic elements\); and race figures importantly in the novel's denouement. Robinson's handling of the issue is careful and tragically appropriate for the story's time: two years after the landmark BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION school desegregation decision and just months before the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, which would launch the modern civil rights movement.](#)



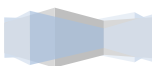
The voices remain persistent and consistent: first we can't write; then a slight concession – a generational slow moving concession - like drool, from mouths, to pillow, to sheets – coupled with the common accusation we write only about race issues. Then an admission – a maybe some can write, recognizing a few; in numbers which can be accurately described as a pitiful pittance. This of course leads to the same consistent historical pattern – race based decisions, permitting writers of other races - read this as white lawyers - to tell race stories (beautiful, insightful, courageous writing – so they say), stage, screen and print.

Race doesn't matter and never will influence these economic and artistic decisions. Right...? So you say...?

Complain too loudly, you are called bitter. Refuse to back off – this causes an even stranger bird's birth – claiming you are racist for identifying and talking about racism. No this analysis is not a complete one, however, the whine on race is not why I write – not my point. This piece however is consistent with the section of my website. Why I Write is designed to provide a bi-annual - November and December of each year -, critical analysis of why I write.

I write because this is same plight of millions of children, young adults - the aged, from cradle to grave; struggling to survive in a hostile world, a constant fight against the tide. Judged differently than others – can't read, can't learn, can't write. The same a position reinforced in the educational system, professional fields and crafts - for generations- pigeonholing we/us in square pegs, when culturally we can never fit into the same peg as the others.

A defiant fight against the myth, and the perpetual lie – forever burdened with a slightly bent psyche (seen and unseen), forever wondering whether she/he/they are right, causing seen and unseen detours, as ones confidence takes flight elsewhere; at times returning predictably/unpredictably, other times never returning.



A constant struggle against the naysayers, wanting he/she/them/they to set aside so you can see the sun, moon, rainbows; hoping her/his/their doubtful eyes doesn't extinguish the desire to work on your art, hoping not to get trapped and become their real-world self-fulfilling prophecy. He/she/they/them may be right – can't write, can't speak - wrong conjugation, improper diction. Maybe...? Perhaps they are...? This too is the reality of the wayward fool; traversing a known and unknown path; the path which we/she/he/us are well familiar; the same historical struggle in which we/she/he and others have endured in a society still struggling with true pluralism. Even if they are – right - I must always trudge forward against type; refuse to concede, until I can't. Part of life' plight – my plight - the reason I write, until it isn't.

