

Suzanne Britt on how she writes...

This is fairly sophisticated writing, but the message is true for you and me --You all are smart enough to dig out the meaning!! So dig...

Asked to tell how she writes, Suzanne Britt contributed the following comment to *The Bedford Reader*.

"The question 'How do you write?' gets a snappy, snappish response from me. 'The first commandment is 'Live!' And the second is like unto it: 'Pay attention!' I don't mean that you have to live high or fast or deep or wise or broad. And I certainly don't mean you have to live true and upright. I just mean that you have to suck out all the marrow of whatever you do, whether it's picking the lint off the navy-blue suit you'll be wearing to Cousin Ione's funeral or popping an Aunt Jemimah frozen waffle into the toaster oven or lying between the dunes, watching the way the sea oats slice the azure sky. The ominous question put to me by students on all occasions of possible accountability is 'Will this count?' My answer is rock bottom and hard: 'Everything counts,' I say, and silence falls like prayers across the room.

"The same is true of writing. Everything counts. Despair is good. Numbness can be excellent. Misery is fine. Ecstasy will work -- or pain or sorrow or passion. The only thing that won't work is indifference. A writer refuses to be shocked and appalled by anything going or coming, rising or falling, singing or soundless. The only thing that shocks me, truth to tell, is indifference. How dare you not fight for the right to the crispy end piece on the standing-rib roast? How dare you let the fragrance of joy go by without taking a whiff of it? How dare you not see the old woman in the snap-front house dress and the rolled-down socks, carrying her Polident and Charmin in a canvas tote that says, simply, elegantly, Le Bag?

"After you have lived, paid attention, seen connections, felt the harmony, writhed under the dissonance, fixed a Diet Coke, popped a big stick of Juicy Fruit in your mouth, gathered your life around you as a mother hen gathers her brood, as a queen settles the folds in her purple robes, you are ready to write. And what you write about, even if you have one of those teachers who makes you write about, say, Guatemala, will be something very exclusive and intimate -- something just between you and Guatemala. All you have to find out is what that small intimacy might be. It is there. And having found it, you have to make it count.

"There is no rest for a writer. But there is no boredom either. A Sunday morning with a bottle of extra-strength aspirin within easy reach and an ice bag on your head can serve you very well in writing. So can a fly buzzing at your ear or heart-stopping siren in the night or an interminable afternoon in a biology lab in front of a frog's innards.

"All you need, really, is the audacity to believe, with your whole being, that if you tell it right, tell it truly, tell it so we can all see it, the 'it' will play in Peoria, Poughkeepsie, Pompeii, or Podunk. In the South we call that conviction, that audacity, an act of faith. But you can call it writing."

