

# Foreword

## Some Friendly Words of Encouragement

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THE WORLD'S oldest writer—is that who I am?

I have been writing for a living since I left high school in 1965. I have conducted interviews with World War One infantrymen (all over a hundred) and I have gotten up in front of hippies at *the* Golden Pines Rock Festival to speak about Vincent Van Gough. I have written for *The Sun News Pictorial*, the *Herald Sun*, *The Age*, and *The Australian*.

I have had no say over what ideas editors have, and usually as a working journalist, you show no initiative and write exactly what they tell you to in order to make a living. Sometimes, amazingly, you are given encouragement and even a rough pat on the shoulder, but mostly it is entirely up to you how to proceed.

Having written stage dramas, screenplays, and dialogue for radio—my favourite medium—it seems to me that the best way to go about the act of creative writing is to bring joy over to your side. Feel fantastic when writing anything, even if you are tackling a play about a brutal murder or hanging. If you feel anxious or depressed, then the writing will be anxious and depressed and this can cause a degenerative experience.

Writing is both truth-telling and poetry-telling. It can be hundreds of things at the same time, but the only way to write is to thoroughly enjoy it—that is to shovel some life into it. Although the word ‘fun’ seems a misnomer these days, what else can you call the work of writing?

If it is torture, the poor reader will no doubt feel tormented reading it. But if your reader suspects that some relish and zeal went into those pages of yours, the same excitement arrives as they go through each scintillating sentence. I am not saying you should be in a state of advanced hysteria whilst you are composing your book or essay, but at least the pleasure ought to be there so it catches the reader.

My encouragement for any writer, young or old, is to thoroughly enjoy the act of writing and revision. If you are a poet, a good thing is to read your poems aloud to yourself in your own room. Do it over and over until you find your style and beat; spoken out loud since poetry is audio.

If you enjoy talking as well as listening, then writing is for you. I continually assure my students, 'Always remember that poetry is for you. Never mind the great John Keats or the great Sylvia Plath, because you can write in a way they never could have. You have to be more like yourself every day, not less like yourself.'

The most fascinating aspect of literature is sincerity, because it cannot be imitated or mocked. If you are completely sincere, then your writing will show that at once. It has the shock of truth. Maybe ask some of your best friends to read your work and hope that their criticisms are encouraging. There is nothing better than encouragement, apart from getting published, I should think.

I should, if I were you, keep a daily diary because daily events can be so small that there are scarcely worth the bother of recording, but equally they can be so hilarious that you will have found a new pleasure altogether.

It is beautiful to find oneself alive and to write as well as you possibly can into a bargain. Writing is the finest bargain you'll ever stumble onto, at least it has been for me at sixty-five years of overexcitement and overenthusiasm, which of course I suffer from vastly.

Barry Dickins  
Author, artist, playwright