

Why I Write: Lee Martin and Terry Tempest Williams

Lee Martin

I write because my father told stories, and I listened. I write because my mother loved books and taught me to love them, too. I write because I want to live in someone else's life. I write because everyone's a mystery, even me, and stories have the power to make us understand. I write because I have to give some shape to the chaos. I write because I fail time and time again, both in my writing and my living. I write because the music of language spoke to me in books and I wanted to make a beautiful noise to answer back. I write because there's so much I don't know. I write because I love to be entertained by a well-crafted narrative. I write because once upon a time someone said to me, "Once upon a time." I write because my fourth-grade teacher told me I had no imagination. I write because rarely in my childhood home did we touch each other with affection. I write because, when I do, I know what it is to love. I write because the end is coming, and I'm whistling in the dark. I write because I want to talk to you; I want to know why you write, or sing, or dance, or paint, or cook, or garden, or play music, or pray. I want to know someone's listening. I don't want to be alone. Please tell me.

Terry Tempest Williams

I write to make peace with the things I cannot control. I write to create fabric in a world that often appears black and white. I write to discover. I write to uncover. I write to meet my ghosts. I write to begin a dialogue. I write to imagine things differently and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change. I write to honor beauty. I write to correspond with my friends. I write as a daily act of improvisation. I write because it creates my composure. I write against power and for democracy. I write myself out of my nightmares and into my dreams. I write in a solitude born out of community. I write to the questions that shatter my sleep. I write to the answers that make me complacent. I write to remember. I write to forget. I write to the music that opens my heart. I write to quell the pain. I write with the patience of melancholy in winter. I write because it allows me to confront that which I do not know. I write as an act of faith. I write as an act of slowness. I write to record what I love in the face of loss. I write because it makes me less fearful of death. I write as an exercise in pure joy. I write as one who walks on the surface of a frozen river beginning to melt. I write out of my anger and into my passion. I write from the stillness of night anticipating -- always anticipating. I write to listen. I write out of silence. I write to soothe the voices shouting inside me, outside me, all around me. I write because I believe in words. I write because it is a dance with paradox. I write because you can play on the page like a child left alone in sand. I write because it is the way I take long walks. I write because I believe it can create a path in darkness. I write with a knife, carving each word from the generosity of trees. I write as ritual. I write out of my inconsistencies. I write with the colors of memory. I write as a witness to what I have seen. I write as witness to what I imagine. I write by grace and grit. I write for the love of ideas. I write for the surprise of a sentence. I write with the belief of alchemists. I write knowing I will always fail. I write knowing words always fall short. I write knowing I can be killed by own words, stabbed by syntax, crucified by understanding and misunderstanding. I write past the embarrassment of exposure. I trust nothing especially myself and slide head first into the familiar abyss of doubt and humiliation and threaten to push the delete button on my way down, or madly erase each line, pick up the paper and rip it into shreds -- and then I realize it doesn't matter, words are always a gamble, words are splinters from cut glass. I write because it is dangerous, a bloody risk, like love, to form the words, to say the words, to touch the source, to be touched, to reveal how vulnerable we are, how transient. I write as though I am whispering in the ear of the one I love.