

On slowing down



Writer Rachel Schwartmann discusses the value of being a creator, finding solitude, and letting yourself fall apart.

June 21, 2024 -

As told to Jess Focht, 2217 words.

Tags: [Writing](#), [Inspiration](#), [Money](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Business](#).

You've spoken with many creative professionals on your podcast and newsletter, Slow Stories, about moving intentionally through a world that asks us to be in a hurry. I'm sure you've learned a lot from various people in various creative fields. But I was curious if an overarching message has surprised you about what you've learned from this experience. Has there been a common theme?

Yeah, I've been surprised by a lot, but something that's been reinforced is that slowness looks so different for everybody. The idea of being slow or changing your relationship with pace depends on the context: if it's personal or professional. What's so amazing to me about this project is that the definition of slowing becomes so expansive... especially in the digital age where everything's packaged as a trend or a name. With slow living, we're almost conditioned to believe that it's supposed to look a certain way—like you're supposed to go to the countryside and bake bread. I know there's more nuance to that, and the people I speak with have reinforced that for me.

What originally got you into the concept and practice of slow living? Was it something that you fell into or was it something you were forced to confront?

A little bit of both. It stemmed from a business that I started in high school accidentally. When I was a senior, I decided to start a Tumblr to include in college portfolios and show whatever writing and storytelling ability I had at that point. I originally wanted to write for magazines. The Tumblr was called "The Style Line," and I was interviewing people about personal style, which back then was very novel. I met with the Tumblr team in person, and at 18, I was thrust into a career doing brand partnerships with them.

I worked as a correspondent for New York Fashion Week for their seasonal creator program. All my dreams at that point were coming true, but I was still at FIT on a more traditional path while also growing the blog. Things were moving really fast, and I was excited that there was momentum. So I decided to leave FIT, relaunch off of Tumblr, and form The Style Line into a business.

That became a small, but mighty company that I ran for about seven years and it went on to encompass a publishing arm, an agency, and then eventually the podcast. But the podcast was in reaction to the fact that I had been going so fast. I was working with so many people and living in service of their needs. When you're a business owner, your needs come last, which is fine, but I had also gotten so far away from the writing. I'd gotten so far away from my nature. You can probably tell as we're speaking that I'm pretty quiet.

This was also against the backdrop of the Girlboss era and this millennial consensus that we all needed to be bosses and entrepreneurs—and there's nothing wrong with that—but I think I fell more in the direction of playing into that narrative versus doing what was true to what I needed. The ironic thing about it is with The Style Line, I was featuring so many businesses and people who were in slow fashion and slow food. I was around people

who were campaigning these values, whereas I was also running a million miles an hour.

So I just got to a point where I felt done with it, and Slow Stories was almost an experiment to see if people also felt this fatigue. I was like, "Why aren't we thinking about these values from slow fashion or slow food and applying them to our digital lives?"

When I first started the podcast, it was more conversations about the rising slow content movement. But as I started to widen the lens of who I was speaking to, I saw a bigger picture emerging—how many people are thinking about time and pace overall. The through line is slow storytelling, reflecting on our stories, and then seeing how that can help us reimagine our relationship with time and pace. It was part accident, part intention.

That's super interesting, especially the Girlboss movement. I remember that. I think it's the result of the illusion of the American dream and entrepreneurship that is very present in our society. Also, I've followed your work for a couple of years. It's inspiring to hear you talk about where you started and where you are now and how it really can be such a long process of listening to your true self. It seemed like you were listening to that self, and you had to take the time to listen to it and build something beautiful from that.

I had to grow up too. I started The Style Line when I was 18 and everyone was like, "Oh, it's amazing." But also, I didn't know myself yet in a lot of ways.

I knew that I wanted to make something. I've always wanted to make things, and I've always been very creative, but I needed to go through the growing pains of being young in that era and trying to make something happen...then realizing it's not going to look the way you thought it would, but that doesn't mean it was wrong. It just laid the foundation.

I love your online curation, vision, and consistency. There's also a sense of calmness in your digital presence that feels very refreshing for scrolling and just being online. How do you approach your day-to-day content creation?

That's a good question. I think because of Slow Stories and everything we just mentioned, I'm trying not to add any more digital clutter to the internet. And that's not to say that what I post isn't something you could find somewhere else. I'm not the only person who posts outfits or books or interiors, but I think I just try to approach it from a place where I'm not trying to feed an algorithm. It's just something that feels right internally and feels cohesive visually. I'm very intuitive. I'm really drawn to light and seasons and let those visual elements inform what I want to document—and then share.

How do you create a balance for yourself, or limit distractions while also being very online as a writer?

I don't want to say my content creation fuels my writing, but I think it's taught me that I'm a very visual writer. I need to see things that are beautiful or interesting and ignite something that allows me to hold onto an image or an idea, then step away from my screen and think about it. Then have that translate into writing.

They are symbiotic in that way. You know how the saying, "You write the books you need for yourself," goes. I'm still trying to find balance. The question of balance changes every day. I think I would be hard-pressed to find someone who believed that you could do the same thing every day and you wouldn't feel an itch to try something new or to let yourself fall out of balance.

I think that's the thing too. A lot of what I've learned from writing and creating and starting a business and just making things is you don't have a lot of control at the end of the day, so let yourself fall apart.

I write about slowing down in the digital age or against the backdrop of it, and I'm aware that these platforms aren't going to go away and this is how we live now.

Do you have any daily creative rituals that get you in a space to create?

I sit with my rabbit.

Oh my God, your rabbit is so cute.

I don't know if that's creative but it's fun and it relaxes me. It gets me into a state outside of myself. She's just so great. She's taught me how to care for something other than myself.

Sitting with an animal is so healing.

People underestimate having a furry companion and how grounding it can be.

I also walk—I like doing solo walks. I need space to think. I journal. Sometimes it's just rants or things that I can't say out loud. It's nice to have a place to put those thoughts because it unburdens me to be able to think a little bit more clearly. Those are some pretty recurrent things.

Something I've always found really interesting about your work is the juxtaposition of slowness with a city like New York. I relate to striving to live my day-to-day at a slower pace because I think I'm naturally a slower, more meditative person, and I think it can clash with the pace of New York sometimes: the chaos, the traffic, the tons of people. What's your relationship with the city? How do you stay slow in such a fast city?

I think it depends on the personal or professional realm. I've spent most of my life here, but professionally, this is a place that's known for a hustle and grind. I've really taken a step back from "scenes." I have gotten to a place where I need that solitude here. And being close to Prospect Park is really helpful.

New York is a place full of so much energy, and I think that's why creatives love it here. But I think it's also so much about a balance of, "Okay, I want to be a part of this, but I also need to maybe take a step back and have some slow time."

Do you have any advice for artists or creators who want to find more of that slow time but feel like they just haven't been able to?

I think it's about owning what you need. It can be really hard to face yourself in a landscape that's asking so much of you all the time. You really need to own your needs, own where you are, and not shy away from that out of fear or FOMO.

I think it really starts with acceptance, and it can take a while to get there. But once you do, a lot of that excess stress falls away, and you can channel it in more meaningful directions. You can take that maybe energy and instead of focusing it on what somebody might think, focus it on something that means something to you or something you want to work on with yourself.

The pandemic definitely changed our relationships to ourselves and to connection. I am a really big proponent of alone time and sitting with yourself because when everything else falls away, this is it. It's all we get. And then more tangibly, I think if you can find yourself or put yourself near nature, that's always helpful.

What has living intentionally taught you about yourself and, on a greater level, the world?

It's taught me gratitude. What I get to do is such a privilege, and that's not lost on me. And the fact that I get to speak to so many amazing people like you about these things, that's such a rarity, and I'm grateful for that. It's teaching me something new every day just to remain open to things, which can be really hard. When you approach things from a place of expansiveness, you open yourself up to things that you didn't know were possible. Sometimes those things aren't what you thought they'd look like, but that doesn't mean that they won't add value or beauty to your life in some way.

I think it's also taught me about creating things. The word creator is lumped in with content now, and yes, I create that, but I've also created a business and a community and podcast episodes and books and sentences. It's taught me to be more intentional with how we frame certain things. I think we're all creators in some way. We're creators of our lives, and we get to rewrite the rules if we want to. It's also taught me about creating work that's intentional, work that people want to keep.

With my book, if someone buys it one day and then they're going through all their books and deciding which ones they want to give to their little free library or keep, I want them to look at it and be like, "That's something I should hold on to." And same with the digital stuff too, especially in a world with so many tabs open—hopefully the things that I make people want to bookmark and save and go back to. It's taught me to be intentional in that regard: Creating for myself, but also knowing it's going to be received by someone and it's worth taking up space in their life.

Rachel Schwartmann recommends:

Lionhead rabbits. I've raised Pepper since she was about six weeks old (she'll be seven this year), and I'm a better person for it.

Winner's sourdough croissant.

Marveling at small, seasonal changes (think foliage, light, etc.).

Reimagining your relationship with pace

Carrying a journal on the go

Name

Rachel Schwartmann

Vocation

writer

□