

On finding the time for your creative work



Writer and handyman Garth Miró on his go-to rituals, the value of having a day job, and the sick fantasy of "taking a vacation."

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As told to Lindsay Lerman, 2390 words.

Tags: [Writing](#), [Process](#), [Inspiration](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Day jobs](#).

Do you have any writing habits or routines or rituals, anything you rely on every time you sit down to write?

I definitely have rituals. I write every day and try to write at least a thousand words just so I can get into a flow. Because I feel if I don't write a certain amount, I don't hit that flow period. My writing in the day, a lot of those thousand words are going to be cut. A lot of shit. And then as far as where I sit, it's kind of weird, but a lot of times when I want to really zone out and drown out outside noise, I'll sit on or just lay on the bathroom floor with my computer on my chest and have the shower on just for the noise of the water. I do that a lot, especially editing. You don't hear anything. That white noise kind of just takes away any internal thoughts that aren't on the work at the time.

So you just have the shower going!

I know, it's weird. I don't know why I do it. When I was a kid I had really bad asthma. I would get bad asthma attacks, and my mom would throw me in the shower room and shut the door with the steam going. And that would help me, you know, clear up my asthma. And I think just because of that, it has this safe connotation to me or something.

So maybe it's comforting? On a subconscious level, is it like your mom is taking care of you as you're writing?

Yeah.

I like to ask that question because I've met a lot of writers who say they don't have any ritual. But then once you get them talking about it, it turns out they actually do. One of my favorite examples of someone who has a very small but significant ritual is Toni Morrison. I guess she would have to touch the doorway of whatever room she was in. Wherever she was writing, she would go to the doorway, touch it, and then she could step into the writing.

Do you like to write at night or during the day?

Well, I'm a handyman, so I have a weird schedule. So, whenever someone books me, that's when I'm working. I'm writing all different times, but definitely my preference is very late at night, when my wife is asleep or like the city is a little bit quieter. When everything's quiet and I feel like everyone's asleep, I kind of almost feel I'm getting ahead or cheating or something.

I wrote most of my last book really late at night or really early in the morning. There's something about that time when it feels like the world is sort of tucked away and asleep. The normal rules don't apply. It's like everything is a little more open. There's not the cars rushing by. There's not people on their way to work or home from work or whatever. The real world is suspended a little bit.

We're like, right up against the dream world. We're butting up against it or something. Maybe tapping into it a little bit.

I don't know about you, but I think I tap into the dream world more than I can sometimes admit to myself when I'm writing.

Especially when I get into it. Like what I was saying. You get into the flow of writing. There's that state of your mind. At least in my mind, when I get to the thing where I'm not thinking at all. Where's it coming from? And when I get into a really good flow, I feel it's just coming from somewhere else. It just comes out. So yeah, I think that's definitely a good place to write. A good time to write.

Has that ever scared you? Like the fact that it sort of feels like it's coming from somewhere else? I don't know your full history as a writer—maybe you've been writing for like 20 years and I don't know it—but has it ever gotten to a point where you almost want to pump the brakes?

Okay, so I've only been writing for like three years. But I have written almost four novels. The first three were just absolute shit and I think what I was doing was trying to learn how to write with those first three, you know? Because I didn't go to school or anything. So I'm just trying to teach myself how to write. At one point I would lock myself in the bathroom for two days. And I'm like, *I'm going to not leave this bathroom until I finish this very long section that I just couldn't finish at the time.* My wife was literally feeding me meals and I was living like I was in jail or something. Some Thailand prison, eating on the floor. I felt like maybe I'm losing my mind a little bit and what am I doing to try to get into that state? But once I get in the state, I definitely don't think it's scary. I actually think it's like one of the most calming periods. I have a very overactive mind. And when I can get to that state where I'm not thinking, I feel like that's a meditation almost.

I wanted to ask you also about what you do as a handyman and how that interacts with your writing life. Would you say it's additive or subtractive? What's the relationship between your work life and your writing life?

There's definitely instances where I go to a place and, you know, this is New York City: there's a lot of weird people. I go and I'm like, wow, this is a story in itself. Whether the person's talking to me about their life or something just very strange happens while I'm there.

I was helping a porn star who had just bought this new apartment hang up her TV and she was definitely on drugs, having me switch where the TV went over and over. We kept going from room to room, and she was telling me all about her life. I was there for like 2 hours. So there's things that definitely happen that because of my job, maybe other people don't see as much. I kind of sneak into people's lives.

You know, the best thing would be to maybe not have a job, but then I'm going to lose all that, all the interactions. So maybe it's both good and bad.

I struggle with that, too. On the one hand, I want to be able to just write and lose my connection to the real world and not have to work a normal job ever again. But also, I know that's just not realistic. I've never done just one thing at a time. I've always been the person who has eight things going at once and I think that's just better for me, to be distributed through time and space and have different shit going on. For me, it's just time to let go of that dream of the artist as only the artist, like that was maybe a 20th century thing and not anymore.

It's definitely not anymore. And I think you can't put everything into writing and make writing your whole life. You're putting it on a pedestal too much. When you're too obsessed with writing as a writer, I feel it in some

people's work. They're almost writing nerds or something.

Well, I am definitely one of those. [laughs] But I'm a nerd for everything—all reading, writing, thinking, expression, art in general. And I do get obsessive about it. But I know what you mean.

Yeah, you need to be a person, too, so that you're not just writing from an aesthetic point all the time. Where you're writing from a place of reality, you live in the world, you're interacting with the world. You're not just completely shut off looking at it as a painting or something.

That leads to another thought I had when I was reading an interview with you and Claire Hopple. You said something about how you don't like philosophy and maybe also a whole bunch of literature too. And I wanted to dig into that and see what's going on there for you. Is it related to this concern that you can just get lost in abstraction and not be connected to real life?

Definitely. Yeah, that's it. And I mean, I was being hyperbolic. I definitely read philosophers and like a lot of them. But a lot of them, I feel like they're just going around sticking flags in things. Things we all experience, making it more eloquent or whatever, and having time to think to make it eloquent. Depression is mine now because I talked about it prettiest.

For sure. I've been in and out of philosophy for years, but you probably couldn't find anyone who's more critical of the profession than me. You know, love and hate. But my heart is with people who have experiences that might defy language and existing categories of meaning—all that strange stuff. It's hard to know where to find an engagement with that, other than philosophy or religion. I still want to know, like, what do people say about the ineffable?

I think there's a big revival in that. A lot of people were getting so into logic and obsessed with it. There's been a swing now to the more ineffable, the spiritual. You see it more and more in fiction and art these days. I think we went so hard and so far into logic there had to be a swing back. Now that people are diving more into that. I love Bataille, by the way. I love the *Story of the Eye*, all that stuff. *Blue of Noon*.

I've been thinking about that—how much attention is being paid to vibe right now. Vibe and Mood are so big. I think a lot of that is what you're talking about. It's the swing away from logic, and it's at a very deep level. Everyone understands that what we've all experienced over the past few years defies logic. If we could explain everything in the world logically or scientifically or with reason, then we would know what to make of all of this. But we can't. It defies our understanding. We just don't know. Like, who is really acting rationally?

Yeah, it's crazy.

What makes writing worth it to you—worth all the hassle of dealing with publishing, the stress of trying to do interviews and spread the word, all that. So far, what makes it meaningful for you?

I definitely think it makes it meaningful for me when I set out to achieve something, and then I feel like I've achieved it. So whatever my thought is or whatever my feeling is when I'm writing something, if I can go back and look at that and be like, Yeah, that's exactly what I wanted out of that. That's a meaningful thing for me. And then to a lesser degree, I just like when people enjoy my writing. Any time someone says that they got something out of it, even different than I was intending. Yeah, it's small, but that makes my whole week sometimes.

I would say it's not small at all because if you weren't trying to connect with people, why bother publishing at all? You know, why not just leave it on your computer and never send it out anywhere? Like just have it be for you. But if you want to connect with people and you're looking for something with sending it out there, you have to send it out there. It's like sending out a signal and seeing what the response is, you know?

I think when people say they don't care at all, I'm like, there's no way you would deal with the horrible fucking thing that publishing is, and just all the hoops and the politics and the boring parties you have to go to. If

you didn't care what anyone thought, you wouldn't go through all that to get published. When people say that they're just lying.

Have you been to any boring literature parties recently?

I mean, yeah. In New York there's always a reading or party, especially in the past couple of years. There's a reading every night. There's some readings that are great. I would say the majority are great. But sometimes you feel like you're being held hostage.

What is a vacation?

A vacation is just getting away from your life. I think it's just any time you're taking a break from your normal life. I mean, I've said this in other interviews, but it's become a very weird, perverse thing to me. Vacations are strange and how people go about them, where people are going these days and what people are doing. There's all these vacations now. I don't even know what it's called, but it's almost like poverty tourism. Rich people going to these impoverished areas to make themselves feel good or pretend to help out. And then they end up displacing the local economy because they've set up some stupid T-shirt company that makes it so the local people can't sell t shirts. There's weird stuff going on with vacations now.

When I asked the question, I already had a follow-up in mind. So I was leading the witness in a way. What I'm really wondering is: Is a vacation even possible? Can you vacate your life or is that a sick fantasy?

It's a sick fantasy, I would say. You can try. And the more you try, the more sick I think it gets; the further you have to go just because you want to vacate life. You don't want to vacate your life.

Garth Miró Recommends:

The DeWalt DW511 Hammer Drill

LaoJie Hotpot on 811 53rd St, Brooklyn, NY 11220

Crumb, the Robert Crumb documentary

Havanna brand Alfajores from Argentina

Nam June Paik

Name

Garth Miró

Vocation

writer

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