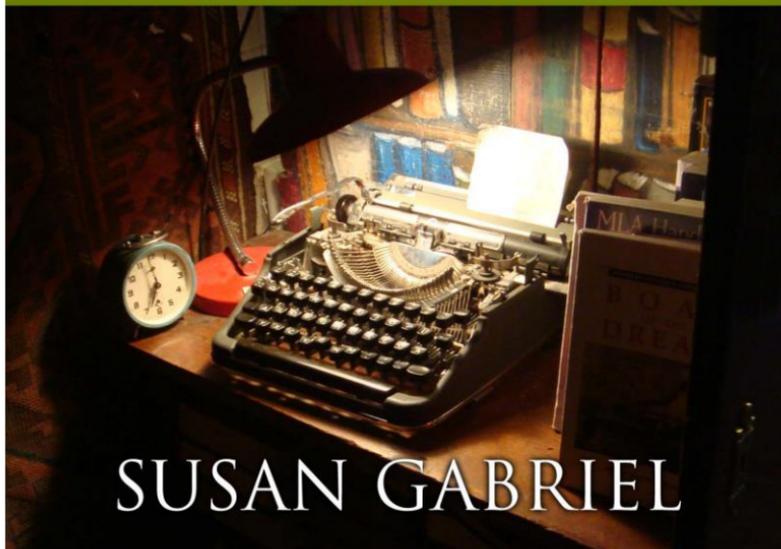


FEARLESS
WRITING
FOR WOMEN

Extreme Encouragement
& Writing Inspiration



SUSAN GABRIEL

Fearless Writing for Women

Extreme Encouragement and Writing Inspiration

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Wild Lily Arts

Fearless Writing for Women

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Cover photograph of Shakespeare & Company Bookstore in Paris by Elena Vilalta

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Foreword

How this book will help you become a Fearless Writer!

All writers are works-in-progress. No matter what we write or want to write we need the courage to start writing and keep going day after day. No small feat, given all the distractions we face as women who work, raise children, take care of elderly parents and otherwise run our workplaces and our homes.

Since our lives are often extreme, we need extreme encouragement and guidance in its essential elements.

In 93 selected writings, stories, lists and amazing quotes, I give you guidance and encouragement that I hope will inspire you, make you think, make you laugh and most importantly, get you writing **today**.

With seventeen years of writing experience, as well as ten years' experience as a licensed professional counselor, I know that living a creative life can be full of blessings, as well as a curse or two.

I know what it's like to question if I have anything to say.

I know what it's like to fear rejection from literary agents, publishers, critics and readers. And I also know how to persevere in spite of my fears.

My second novel, *The Secret Sense of Wildflower*—a historical, southern, coming-of-age story—received a starred review

by Kirkus Reviews and was named to their list of Best Books of 2012. Yet my greatest success lies with a healthy, growing band of readers who await my next book. Readers I genuinely care about and nurture. A strong inner drive also keeps me going and a sense of purpose that won't let me quit. Fueled by inspiration, I've found a treasure trove of material to help me carry on.

This book contains my own original writings, as well as reflections on stories and quotes from well-known authors on how to live the writing life and thrive in it. It includes success stories, inspiring quotes about creativity, as well as dynamic lists that will help you start writing and keep going.

Read the entries one at a time or all at one sitting and let the message of this book work through you. Then act on the guidance. Your writing will get better and your fearlessness as a writer will grow as a result.

I use these stories in my popular Fearless Writing for Women workshops, and I hope they will inspire and encourage you to persevere through those times of your life when you need courage and resilience.

Be bold. Be honest. Be brave.

Artistic Integrity: Stay True to Your Story

It took my twenty-something daughter, who is wise beyond her years and has an artist's soul, to remind me of artistic integrity.

I was in a quandary over what to do with some suggestions my literary agent made, who I respect and adore, about a new manuscript I had sent her.

What I have learned over the years is that if you give a manuscript to a dozen different readers they will come up with a dozen different suggestions on how to make the story better. And what I've also learned is that there are some opinions that you trust more than others. These opinions are usually from people who are professionals (like literary agents and editors) who make a living in the service of stories and/or they are people who read a tremendous amount and intrinsically know what makes a story good.

But still, even those trusted professionals and/or avid readers sometimes say something that doesn't quite mesh with what the writer envisions. And here's where my daughter, Krista, comes in. When I confessed my latest dilemma, her advice was perfect:

“I think this one comes down to artistic integrity. These are YOUR characters, YOUR story, YOUR baby—follow your heart on this one and make sure you love the result.”

Well, you can see why I’m proud. This is sage advice I can pass on to every writer and artist. Sure, there is a need to be flexible and humble and not turn down good suggestions when they are given. But you are responsible for this particular creation and to that end, your **artistic integrity** must be at the core of every decision.

So get some good input and then follow your heart.

Where Ideas Come From

A frequent question asked by my readers is: How do you come up with the ideas for your novels? All the ideas for my books and short stories have come in different ways, but the story of *The Secret Sense of Wildflower* is one of the more interesting ones.



Twelve years ago, at four in the morning, I awoke with a clear, resounding voice in my head. It was the voice of a girl who began to tell me her story: *There are two things I'm afraid of*, she said. *One is dying young. The other is Johnny Monroe.*

A day or two before, I had visited our small family cemetery located in the southern Appalachian Mountains. I spent an afternoon walking among the final resting places of my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, as well as ancestors I

had never known. Had I accidentally brought one of them home with me, who needed her story told?

Rest assured, mental illness does not run in my family. But for a fiction writer, to get the “voice” of a character so clearly is really good news. I, however, wanted to go back to sleep. Who wouldn’t, at 4 o’clock in the morning? For a time, I debated whether or not to get up. I ultimately decided that if I didn’t claim this moment, the “voice” might find someone else to write her story.

Needless to say, I turned on the light, picked up a pen and a pad of paper and began to write the story of Louisa May “Wildflower” McAllister. It took days and weeks of listening to her and seeing the scenes of her life play out in my imagination. Then it took years of revising and revisiting the story to polish it and get it ready. Not to mention the tremendous amount of faith I had to generate to keep going all those years—faith in myself as a writer and faith in Wildflower’s story.

Do ideas always come in this way? No. Sometimes I want to explore a particular theme or a particular place and I lead the storytelling process. But in this instance, it seemed the story led me. My job was to follow and then rewrite to get it as polished as possible.

With that in mind, keep your eyes open for whatever inspires you or creates a spark in your imagination.

It could be a photograph that resonates with you, or a line in a poem or a book that you can’t seem to forget.

It could be a scene that you witnessed.

Or an experience that holds a lot of energy for you.

Even a dream can inspire if it is an especially powerful dream.

All are sustenance for a writer in search of a story to tell.

Search Out Beautiful Writing

My advice to aspiring writers is to search out beautiful writing in everything you read. And if you find it, savor it, write it down and study it. Discover what makes it beautiful to you. Then imitate it using your own words.

Here is something I came across recently that was beautiful to me:

“Like any child, I slid into myself perfectly fitted, as a diver meets her reflection in a pool. Her fingertips enter the fingertips on the water, her wrists slide up her arms. The diver wraps herself in her reflection wholly, sealing it at the toes, and wears it as she climbs rising from the pool, and ever after.”

--Annie Dillard, author of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

For me, the metaphor of the diver is a rich visual image. Images help our writing come alive and we can almost feel the water on our own skin. **Beautiful writing is writing that is alive!**

Girl with a Pearl Earring

What interests you?

According to one of my favorite sources about writers called *The Writer's Almanac*, author Tracy Chevalier moved to London after college to stay for six months, but she fell in love with a British man and never left. She started writing historical novels, and her second book, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999), was a huge best seller.

For the book, Chevalier was inspired one day when she was staring at a poster she had bought when she was 19, a copy of Johannes Vermeer's painting *Girl With a Pearl Earring*. She imagined what life might have been for the young woman who ended up the subject of that painting. She started the book right away, but she was pregnant and she didn't want the book to get lost in her life as a new mother, so she researched and wrote the whole novel in just eight months.

She said:

"Don't write about what you know — write about what you're interested in. Don't write about yourself — you aren't as interesting as you think."

The Art of “Shitty” First Drafts

In *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, bestselling author, Anne Lamott, has a chapter on writing shitty first drafts.

She says:

“All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts. People tend to look at successful writers, writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially, and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars . . . But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. . . .

“For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts. The first draft is the child’s draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. . . . If the kid wants to get into really sentimental, weepy, emotional territory, you let him. Just get it all down on paper, because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means.”

I read *Bird by Bird* over a decade ago, and I still think of Anne Lamott's suggestion every time I start to write something new.

What do you think? Have you written a shitty first draft lately? I hope so.

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What readers are saying about *Fearless Writing for Women...*

“Whether taken in dribs and drabs or read in an all-out sprint (\*raises hand\*), this little gem will provide many moments of uplifting direction for all your creative aspirations. All forms of the written word are covered from the novelist to the poet, and all with great respect and care for the person behind the creation, while still being realistic. A hard line to walk? Not for this author, but then again, she's been there, done that and happy to share her experience with all of us. A great pick for yourself or the writer friend/acquaintance in your life.” – GMR, Amazon review

“Thank you for a terrific resource, a fun read, and a practical and inspiring book! I absolutely loved it and started reading it again as soon as I finished it. The book is helpful and thought provoking, and strikes at the heart of fear that many writers carry around. At first I wasn't sure about the short chapter format, but ended up LOVING it. It was easy to read the book in short sittings and get the GEMS, then return to salient parts. I feel that “Fearless Writing for Women” fills a gap that has existed for many of us and I thank you!” – Deb Hall

An inspiring edition for anyone who is interested in writing, whether for publication or self-exploration. A definite must-read for those who would like to explore their own skills.”

– Diana Hope Gooding

“I will keep referring to this little gift of insight throughout the year. Thanks for the encouragement, the dose of reality, and most of all, the inspiration.”– Susan Evans

“...reflects in a sophisticated yet highly readable voice on many aspects of the writer’s life. It will inspire many creative people, whether writers or not. The book definitely lived up to its title.” – Krista L.

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