

The Dark Writer Rises

One of the most interesting pieces of advice I have ever gleaned from the internet: you should always be yourself, unless you can be Batman, in which case you should always be Batman. My writing, in a way, was always the Batman alter ego to my Bruce Wayne. I used writing as a mask, a sort of shield that allows me to get away with feats of daring I would not even consider attempting in person; behind my notebook, or computer screen, I could muster up the nerve to dole out doses of tongue-in-cheek satire, unfiltered opinions on the state of things I had no authority on, and even a few rare moments of sheer vulnerability. Writing allowed me to transcend my own reality and became the expository lens through which I could shine a spotlight on the people and the world around me. I thought writing was the superpower that could transform me into a superhero.

My writer's origin story is slightly less climatic than training to protect Gotham City and seek revenge against the Joker, but I suppose, like Batman, it did start with me becoming the thing I was afraid of. As a bumbling eleven year old girl, I absolutely abhorred writing and everything it entailed. Writing was tedious, abstract, and just so dull. We were taught to follow a regimented, mechanical five paragraph formula and parrot back the words and ideas of authors who thought for themselves. It did not occur to me that I could also use writing to think for myself. After a string of C's and D's on my returned essays, my English teacher convinced me to join Creative Writing Club to improve my writing. Suddenly, there were no rules. Well, there was just one: write. The page was mine to fill with ideas, without any stakes- no grades or guidelines- and I just started rhyming, line after line, and suddenly, I was a poet. A year later, my best friend and I started writing the eighth *Harry Potter* novel to cope with the end of the series,

Comment [s1]: In my first draft, I discussed my concerns with the essay reflecting two deeply contrasting personas: Batman and Bruce Wayne, and a lot of my peer comments suggested that I wasn't really showing how writing had improved Bruce Wayne (myself). So I tried to refocus the essay on bringing the two personas together, and allowing my ideas of what it means to be a "hero" evolve throughout the essay.

Comment [s2]: I definitely wanted to expand this back story, because a lot of the peer comments wanted to see more of my thought process in becoming a writer, so I tried to add in some more description without making the origin story the focus of the essay.

and suddenly, I was an unfinished author. In high school, I took a journalism class and joined the school paper, and suddenly, I was a journalist. Once the door opened, I had a voracious need to learn every form of writing there was. I wrote dozens of short stories, several expositions to novels, news articles, satirical essays, and a personal art blog. After all these years of training, I think I am finally ready to don the gray tights and cape, so to speak. I think I might be a writer.

So that is the “I Write” part of “Why I Write”; I am, in fact, a writer who writes. But the “why” took me much longer to comprehend. I couldn’t understand my compulsion- I wrote because once I started, I didn’t know how to stop. I didn’t know what people did with their time besides write. That makes it all sound a bit mechanical, I suppose, like I was nothing more than a set of fingers pressing down on keys like a machine. But I didn’t spend all that time learning to be machine, I wanted to be Batman. And like any other superhero, I wanted to use my superpower to achieve what I thought I could not as Bruce Wayne.

At its most selfish core, my writing just started as a way to just be someone else. Even through academic writing, for a few pages, I thought I could trick a reader into thinking I was an intelligent biology student, a skilled research assistant, or a literary analyst. Through fictional prose and poetry, I could be Batman, or a six foot tall, suave, brilliant character with confidence and wit. Through writing, I thought I could build a world where my jokes always got a laugh and my heated rants about the state of humanity actually affected the world. I was never entirely inept without a pencil or a keyboard, but the magic of the eraser or backspace key made any potentially awkward moment disappear entirely. There is no social anxiety or stuttering in writing; writing was my chance to start over and create a world on my terms. But with great power comes- wait, wrong superhero. Point is, eventually I started to realize that my penchant for writing could be used for something greater than my own escapist goals.

Comment [s3]: After I realized how self deprecating this paragraph sounded through the peer review process, my first instinct was to immediately counter all the negativity with a few extra sentences about how I grew from these misconceptions and learned to stop pretending, but I think it was more important to show the natural progression of my thought process as a writer and cap the whole essay with a paragraph about confidence.

I wanted to use my superpower to provide the same escape for others, and to influence people the way so many of my literary heroes have influenced me. In a way, the characters I met through literature in my childhood had almost as much to do with my upbringing as my own parents did. Harry Potter taught me to be courageous and moral, and he remains one of my best friends. The time travelling adventures of Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim showed me how to deal with my anxiety by illustrating the fluidity of life. And I do not exaggerate when I say Ned Vizzini's character; Craig Gilner, helped me survive high school by putting into words thoughts and feelings I couldn't articulate. These writers shared their stories to help people like me feel less alone in the world, and to share their wisdom about morality and life. I wanted to be just like them- to be some person's literary hero, to have one of my characters teach someone else about the world. I wanted to tell people my stories.

But that was not enough either. Part of my fascination with becoming someone entirely new stemmed from my need to give other people a voice, to tell their stories as well as my own. Maybe that is a bit more Clark Kent than Bruce Wayne, but I have an insatiable desire to understand the lives and intentions of others, and writing became a tool for me to do that. Through news articles, stories, and essays, I had the privilege of sharing someone else's story. People opened up to me in interviews; they told me how they saw the world and taught me to see things from different vantage points. After a while, I stopped using journalism and novel research as an excuse to get to know peoples' stories. Bruce Wayne came out from behind the mask. Part of my superpower is the ability to listen to what others have to say, and to use writing as a way of understanding people in a different way. Listening to the stories of others gives me a fresh perspective on the world around me. It is a form of humility to see from vantage points that

are not my own. It was this compulsion to understand other people that led me to pursue psychology.

In a much less literary and metaphorical way, I write so that I may be able to convey new psychological research in the future. Working in a research lab, reading articles about new treatments that could change how we treat social anxiety, it redefined the purpose of writing for me. I stopped using writing to pretend I was a capable, intelligent research assistant, and worked hard to become one instead. Through research, writing is no longer about simply telling the stories of other people; it has the power to change those stories and to heal those suffering from mental illness. Every new medical treatment and test that has ever been done in the history of psychology has been submitted as a written proposal and presented as a paper for the entire scientific community to read and build upon. I watched firsthand as researchers built new ideas from the papers of others, and saw work I had read about in articles on the evening news. I realized that I could develop the next method of treatment or bring us a fraction of an inch closer to understanding the human brain. In my mind, that's what a real superhero does.

I thought writing was the superpower that would allow me to become a new person. But in truth, writing gives me an even greater power: the confidence to make Bruce Wayne just as much of a hero as Batman. I'm not sure when the confident, capable, and intelligent fictional character I created for myself started to become a reality, but writing has given me the courage to take off the mask and stop hiding the person I am. I am still in the process of becoming the writer the world deserves, and I'm certainly not yet the writer it needs, but I write to save the world. Maybe it is just the world of one other person, maybe it is the world of psychology, or maybe it is just the world inside of my head. Writing gave me the confidence to be a hero without a mask, and I intend to use it to make sense of the world and help others do the same.

Comment [s4]: I don't even think I realized that this was the point of this whole essay, and really this whole journey until I reflected on the first draft of this essay. In a way, talking to my peers and going in for the one on one meeting made me realize the real reason I write, and I think I really understand the whole point of this assignment now.