

What Difference Does Writing Make?

Leading Writers on Writing

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Only the Lonely

By Laura Haughey

She loved this time of the morning. The few precious minutes between night and day, when somehow it was both at the one time. The first early rays of the sun would peek over the land, yet the stars were still there, their own light sent out across a distance far greater than she could comprehend, to meet her eyes.

But as much as she loved it, she greeted this time with a sense of sadness too. Another day was over for good. Another step forward in life. A new day. Hey-ho let's go, same old all over again.

This morning was the same. And yet, it was different. He was there with her, as he always was. They lay there together on the sand, he with his head on the ground, hers propped up by her hand. She smiled as she reached out and ran a hand down the side of his face. His eyes closed in pleasure as she rubbed the underside of his neck. She let her hand drop down on to the ground and he moved his head on to it. The stars began to fade into the background as the sky lightened.

It had been a morning much like this, the morning they had met. She had awoken with a start, the demons from her dreams fading into little more than memories as she rubbed the grit from her eyes. She had stumbled half-blind out of bed and over to the window and stood there for a moment. The world had seemed like a different place. So ... empty, devoid of life and light. Only the waves moved, rocking slowly from sea to land and back to sea again.

She'd felt suffocated all at once, in her small little house on the hill. She'd pulled on her coat over her nightdress, buttoning

it up tight ,and carefully slid her feet into her dark gumboots. Then left the house, journeying down the hill until she reached the beach. She'd stood there for a moment, her eyes closed, listening to the waves pounding against the earth, feeling the salty breeze pull at the little tendrils of hair that fell around her ears. Then, across her face, she'd felt the warm glow of the morning sun, which had brought her back to the present. She'd reluctantly opened her eyes and that's when she saw him.

He, like she, was alone and making his solitary way up the beach. He had seen her and started towards her and she had felt frightened. But she had not run. She could not run. He had stood there before her, his eyes on hers and he'd looked so tired and so lost that her heart went out to him. She'd led him home, fed him and taken care of him. At night they slept on the same bed, she lying next to him, each finding warmth and comfort in the other. And every morning they walked, each step sinking deep into the soft, wet sand, together but yet alone at the same time. Life was simple and repetitive, but it was theirs and that was all that mattered.

However, life does not remain constant. She woke up at the same time she always did one morning, but something was different. It was him. He uttered no noise, simply looked up into her eyes. She'd seen the pain, however, and the weariness and she too had felt a sickness in her stomach, a premonition of the grief that was to come.

Something changed for good that day. She'd still cared for him, more and more as he steadily got weaker and weaker. He was still there with her, but something was gone. They hadn't walked since that morning. Until now.

His movement had woken her and he stood patiently, waiting by the door as she slowly pulled the coat over her nightdress, buttoning it up tight and carefully slid her feet into the dark gumboots. Something had changed. He was more alive than he had been for weeks, seemingly charged with some energy that almost sparked out from his eyes. They'd run together, away from the house and down the hill, on to the beach. The salty breeze blew over them and beside them the waves pounded on to the surface of the beach. For once they

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were not alone. They were together. They were happy. They were at peace.

And then he had stumbled and fallen and she had knelt down beside him in concern. The sparkle in his eye was gone, but it had not been replaced by pain. There was something else ... acceptance. It was the end. They both knew it and neither of them could do anything to stop it. But neither did they feel the need to.

She looked at him now, feeling her heart soar with affection, wanting somehow to tell him what joy his presence in her life had brought her. She wanted to tell him how much she'd miss him. But she knew she didn't need to.

"I love you," she said to him. "You know that don't you?" He did not make a noise, simply feebly wagged his tail, once, twice and closed his eyes. He was gone.

And once more she was alone.

A prickling at the corner of her eye; a single tear slowly trickled down her face, dropping to hit the sand below. And then another tear. She was crying. Crying like she hadn't for years, like she'd never stop. Her shoulders heaving, her face cradled in her hands. Crying for him yes, but mostly for herself.

Then there was warmth upon her face; the first early rays of the sun. She felt exhausted, both physically and emotionally, but somehow the light gave her strength. She stood slowly, shakily, wiping the tears from her face. Her gaze was drawn to the body of her companion, which lay upon the sand. His journey was over, but hers was not. The thought made her weary, but life had to go on.

Turning away from the beach she spied her small little house upon the hill. She would go back to sleep and eat. Tomorrow she would wake up at that time of morning she loved, when it was somehow both day and night at the same time. And she would walk.



Laura Haughey wrote this essay in 2006 when she was in Year 12 at All Saints College, Maitland, New South Wales.