

When a Stranger Posted her Writing on Twitter, I Couldn't Help But...

Hi Bookfoxers,

A person posted an excerpt of her writing on Twitter.

Normally, this set up does not lead to good results. You might be worrying that the excerpt was a half-baked pile of stinky.

But no! This person had won several awards for her writing and the excerpt was FANTASTIC. I mean, so vulnerable and funny and insightful. It was only one long paragraph but I loved it.

But she said something very curious. When she introduced it, she called it “Low-stakes writing, low-stakes art.”

Why did she do that? I think she was trying to downplay it. Like: *don't take this too seriously, I don't know whether it is any good.*

We do that so often, don't we? Give a piece to someone else and we try to protect ourselves psychologically:

- “It's probably not any good.”
- “I didn't work very hard on it, it's just a rough draft, so go easy on it.”

When you put work out into the world, please don't downplay it. Let it stand on its own two feet.

So I responded. I had to.

I told her it wasn't low stakes at all, it was actually fantastic. I loved it. I wanted her to write more pieces like this. And she responded by saying:

“I guess I mean low-stakes for me because it seemed like an idea that was too silly to submit for publication so I wrote it just because I wanted to.”

Writing something “just because you want to” is the best reason ever to create.

The stuff that's too silly, or too offensive, or too random, or too weird for publication – that's the stuff that's really worth publishing!

It's counter-intuitive, but the stuff that *isn't* meant for publication is often our best work. Why is that? Because it frees us from the shackles and straightjackets we put on our imagination.

I think sometimes when we release ourselves from the expectations of publishing, we can create even better work. It helps us to be free to play ... and the spirit of playfulness is always at the heart of great art.

And to be honest, this is something I've struggled with as well.

When I was in my MFA program for fiction, I focused on writing Big Important Literary Stories. These didn't work well, probably because I was trying to impress people.

It wasn't until I got out of the program, and just started writing whatever, just for the heck of it, without worrying about the market or what would be published, that I started creating better fiction.

I decided I would write what I wanted. And have fun.

Writing something "just because you want to" is the best way to write something! It's coming straight from the joy of your human heart. It has something real and alive in it rather than something calculated or something attuned to the trends in the book market.

Often writing for low-stakes,

John Matthew Fox