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## EVERY MORNING IS A CRISIS

by John Prin

Every morning is a crisis: the hardest part is getting out of bed. Always the conflict storming in my will—having to leave the house to accomplish what I don't want to do instead of staying home and accomplishing what I do want to do.

Every day I search for the faith to believe that one day the time and the freedom will come when what I *really* want to do will become primary and my servitude to earning a dollar will be secondary. What is primary? Writing fiction and plays which come from my imagination. What is secondary? Writing articles and ad copy which come from my crafty fingers. The first is for growth and self-realization; the other fulfills a middle-class destiny.

It's the difference between feeling your soul, in all its dimensions, touching an audience, and observing your skill with words selling products to your corporation's customers. It's the difference between passion and necessity.

Necessity says, "Writer, sell your skills to the highest bidder, no matter what the cause. Money is the highest purpose to strive for. Support your family, community, self. Welcome to the rat race."

Passion says, "Author, spill your soul to the widest audience, no matter what the cost. The highest purpose is to dramatize the human condition. Give your all to readers, viewers, listeners, humankind. Welcome to glory and immortality."

For twenty-five years I've been in this conflict of values. It started in high school when I realized that the system places more importance on grades than on learning. I was gradually coaxed away from taking the time to immerse myself in a subject and urged to study it superficially instead. That way I could pass an exam, get an A, please a teacher. I was rewarded.

But I was also robbed. I was robbed of genuine learning, which requires experimentation and time and exploration and a zest for fun. That's the slow, gradual way, and it seldom leads to short-term prizes. but it can lead to discovery, and discovery is learning.

By the time I caught onto this, I'd graduated from four years of college and was out on the street looking for a career. Did my future employers care about discoveries? No way. When I presented them with a discovery, they saw development costs. I was probably seen as an upstart with "bright, new, impractical ideas," and I learned that careers take a back seat to earning a buck.

Meanwhile, I wasn't eating and the heat bills weren't getting paid. So I did what I'd been taught—just as I had once worked for grades, I now worked for paychecks. And, of course, I was rewarded.

And cheated.

The jobs I had were with a national chain department store, a soap factory, an industrial film lab, a commercial film studio, ten years of freelance film work in Hollywood's TV industry, and, most recently, four years of public relations and advertising writing at an international computer company, always with increasing pay and decreasing satisfaction. From 90 cents an hour to \$40,000 a year; from hopes of being recognized as a serious writer to the realities of a nine-to-five grind, complete with stress-related backaches and teeth-grinding.

The paradox is, while I have been able to make a better living, the demands on my time and energy have prevented me from living better.

The real work I believe myself destined to do goes undone, even though every week for the past thirteen years I've invested an average of ten to fifteen hours of spare time in writing fiction and plays. Try finding time to write when forty hours or more a week are spoken for, week after week, year after year. The constant problem of making time to pursue my heart's desire, of putting aside other priorities like family and recreation in order to do what I believe is vital, is, well, constant.

Now and then my mind drifts to the tempting thought of dropping out, of chucking the job and the lifestyle that goes with it. But that would be like throwing out the life with the style, because the people who depend on me—my wife, my daughter, and others in my family—are too important.

It's not that I begrudge any of my responsibilities. My only regret is that the fiction and plays I've written haven't been profitable to date; they don't generate even a welfare-level income. As I keep trying to improve both my story writing and story marketing, what cuts me to my core is the irony that the brochures I write pay so well and the stories I author pay so little. My time is spent crafting, not creating; wordsmithing, not storysmithing.

For all this, I have to admit that there are some payoffs. My business writing has disciplined me to define messages in terms of audiences, not myself. It has forced me to become a word-servant, helping others to communicate their thoughts and ideas. It's taught me humility, in other words.

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from the Loft

Then there are the benefits of being on an editorial team. I have the assurance of acceptance. I know ahead of time that what I write will be useful and make its way to print. Closure, not *always in progress, never in print*.

Then, too, I've become more amenable to criticism, to editing and suggestions (at least there *is* feedback). And playing on a team has introduced me to a handful of friends who spend a lot of time caring deeply about writing.

Discipline. Feedback. Teamwork. Acceptance. Not a bad set of shackles.

Still, I fantasize about the day when I can retire. That's the day when, at last, economic imperative will stop eroding my schedule and the money I've worked so hard to earn will add up to freedom. Then my IRAs and money market accounts and mutual funds will supply our modest, American-dream needs, and I can sit down at my word processor unencumbered by the clamor of everyday business demands. Then, finally, I can make decisions about plot and character and setting and dialogue all day long, uninterrupted, in peace.

In retirement I foresee finding a place and space where the primary is once and for all primary; where first things, finally, come first. Purity of purpose. I even foresee writing without the remotest fear of not selling my creations—another form of grades and paychecks—all in an atmosphere of (sweet justice!) discovery. Of learning. Of exploration. Of experimentation. Of love.

Meanwhile? Anxiety, frustration, sometimes depression. An occasional attack of calling an editor a blasphemous name. A seizure of ripping my rejected manuscript into pieces. A bout of silence; reflective, smoldering bewilderment.

The answer may not be more time away from my current job or more years of retirement. It may not be more submissions to more markets, or more rewrites based on more feedback. It may be that I have to accept second best as rewarding just because it's what I'm doing every day.

Or it may be that my time just hasn't come.

The clock ticks faster each day and I sleep in a little longer each morning. Too many midnight fiction-writing sessions. When I awake, my responsibilities as an organizational man press upon me. I ask myself, "Are you

going to pursue your vision today, John, or put that aside and be a servant?"

Then begins the morning ritual—rise, shine, shower, shave, strangle myself with a tie, the 8.3-mile commute, the treadmill of corporate tasks, all leading to the paychecks that are invested for the day when . . .

Freedom comes.

Freedom, as I have heard it defined, is the capacity to do what you know you ought to do. For me, having the time to do what calls deep within me is the beginning. All the A's, the promotions, bonuses, blue ribbons or pats-on-the-back I get mean very little if I'm recognized for something superficial, something secondary, something of monetary value only. Freedom means no longer having to subvert my zeal for the primary by putting on an Academy Award-winning performance of taking the secondary seriously.

No more paying the high price of making money.

It's a choice. Every morning. A choice of what to do; of whether to stay or go. A choice of attitude: whether to go to my job willingly or rebelliously. The path of adventure or the highway to security? I gaze up at the ceiling, committed to trying to do what I love doing while aware that I'm at least making a living with my words. My respect for words remains. My talent with them pays the bills and will, I hope, one day express that inner part of me bursting to dramatize the human condition.

As I roll out of bed and put my feet on the floor, I choose to do my very best at both kinds of writing. My time will come; yes it will.



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