



NORMA DUNNING

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# MY WRITING

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## *My work*

WRITING IS WORK.

WRITING IS REWRITING.

WRITING IS A SICKNESS.

REAL WRITERS NEVER  
INTRODUCE THEMSELVES  
AS WRITERS.

REAL WRITERS NEVER TALK  
ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE  
WORKING ON RIGHT NOW.

REAL WRITERS DON'T  
WRITE FOR THEMSELVES.

REAL WRITERS WRITE ON  
BEHALF OF THEIR PEOPLE.

REAL WRITERS WRITE  
WHAT THEY KNOW.

I have been fortunate in the recognition that my work, my writing, has received. I've been blessed by juries and the many readers who see value in my words. I would like to thank the jurors who fought for my books to be awarded. I've been a juror, and it is not easy work. It is not work that should be taken lightly. I know what it is to fight for the book that fell into my heart, but not anyone else's. I know what it is to connect to other writers' words and fall in love with their writing.

My approach to my writing is based on truth. The truth of Inuit lives in Canada. The truth of my own life as an Indigenous, much older, female writer. I am not the horse a publisher should bet on. I am not young. I am not filled with endless energy. The energy required to travel or speak coherently on Zoom for hours. I am not a gorgeous little thing that an audience would fall in love with. I am only me.

I believe real writers write endlessly. We can't stop ourselves even on those days when the writing is not coming through the way we feel it should. It is our shared sickness. It is our shared vomitorium. Words replacing food with the need to empty ourselves.

Writing short stories means you must write with constant care. Constant focus.

Every word must stand on its own. Every sentence must hold value and contribute strategically to the story itself. Do I know how this is done? Not really.

What I know, and what real writers know, is that feeling of being "on." That feeling of "nailed it!" Along with real writers, shared sickness is the orgasmic euphoria of knowing when you've achieved something that you did not start out doing. That feeling of the words and the characters sitting in the driver's seat and the real writer becomes entranced by them. It is an out-of-body experience. It is beautiful.

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Indigenous people learn at a young age that what we do in this world during our time on this earth is not for ourselves. It is for the next generation. We are here. We have survived since before the inception of time. We should have died from one form of genocide or another. The real writer writes for the next generation. The real writer gives back to their people.

The biggest act of resistance for an Indigenous person is to breathe. With each breath, we hold a responsibility to our children, our grandchildren, and our great grandchildren. They are the ones who will benefit from our work. If you are not writing for the next generation, don't write at all.

The worst question I get asked is, “What is your process?” I always feel like someone thinks I have the magic bean to publishing. I don’t. What I think I have learned and am always answering while I am writing is, “How is the reader taking this in?” When I am writing, I assume everyone on earth knows what I am writing about. I assume I don’t have to explain further. I also assume that I am brilliant. I am not.

I often must remind myself to write slower. To take the time to flesh things out. I have to remember to bring my reader with me because I have the best story for them to read. This is where writing is really only rewriting and rewriting and rewriting. This is when we have to think of the importance of giving our readers the best part of ourselves. They deserve it.

I wonder if staring at it will cause me to stroke out. Writing is a gift. The time given over to writing is precious.

I do not have an exact style. I am always stunned by how others see things in my writing that I do not. I am usually happy with what they see. I am grateful they see it differently than I do. I will say that I fall in love with my characters. My characters are real people to me. I am always sad when I finish a story, but I tell myself that I can always return to these beautiful people who take up physical space in my apartment and live inside of me. I want everyone to love them the way I do.

At the end of every day, our lives are about gratitude. For everyone who writes, please remember to give thanks for the gift of writing. Give thanks to the readers. Give thanks to the agents and editors

*Norma Dunning is an Inuk professor, grandmother and writer. Her short story collection, Tainna (the unseen ones), received the Governor General’s Literary Award for 2021. Annie Muktuk and Other Stories received the Danuta Gleed award in 2018. Dunning’s first collection of poetry, Eskimo Pie: a poetics of Inuit Identity, was released in 2020. Her second collection of poetry, Akia (the other side), will be published in July 2022. Kinauva? (what’s your name?), Dunning’s first work of nonfiction, will release in 2023. She lives in Edmonton.*

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I’ve always been skeptical of the people who introduce themselves as writers. I’ve been in the company of writers who bemoan edits and deadlines over their accepted and contracted manuscript. I always think that this behaviour is spiked with arrogance. Writing is work. Do the work and do it well.

I’ve never had the luxury of not working at least two jobs at once. Writing full time is for those who have a partner who is making six figures. I am alone. The tidbits of time I have in front of my laptop are cherished even on the days when I watch the cursor blink at me for two hours, while

and publishers who believe in your words. They are our helpers. Give thanks to who you write for. Give thanks for being able to do work that you love. Give thanks for what you believe in.

HONOUR YOUR ANCESTORS.

HONOUR YOURSELVES.

HONOUR ALL OF THOSE WHO ARE WAITING TO COME TO US WITH YOUR BEST WORDS. ■

