

I've also posted here a review for LA Yoga Magazine by Suza Francina (www.suzafrancina.com)

Book Review

Writing Begins with the Breath, Embodying Your Authentic Voice

By Laraine Herring

Shambala, 2007

Destiny dropped this book in my lap just in the nick of time. When I saw the title, "Writing Begins with the Breath" for this yogi-writer, it was love at first sight! This spirited guide to the craft of writing has given me the tools I need to turn my rambling journals into a published spiritual memoir.

Now, as I leaf through the book to write this review, I see underlined sentences on almost every page. This new guide will take its rightful place alongside the other classics that propel me down the writing path: Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write*, Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*, Deena Metzger's *Writing for Your Life* and many others.

Laraine Herring is an award winning author and a master teacher of creative writing. She teaches workshops which use writing as a tool for healing. This book is sprinkled with lively anecdotes from her experiences as both student and teacher.

Part One, entitled "Focusing the Mind," opens with a chapter called "Risk." Herring recalls how the memoirist Michael Datcher was giving a seminar where he discussed the element of personal risk. A writer must ask herself, "What are you willing to risk to tell your stories?" She goes on to say that Datcher implied that "If we played it safe, hedged our bets, we were doing a disservice to our art. He wanted us to metaphorically slice ourselves open and see what oozed out."

In Part Two, Laraine Herring takes us into the "Deep Writing Process." Here I felt her leap out of the page and shake her finger at me like some strict English teacher. "When you don't pay attention to how scenes are sculpted, how point of view works, or how best to punctuate your sentences, the result is sloppy writing. Your inattention to detail is disrespectful to your reader and your art."

"Deep writing comes from our bodies, from our breath, and from our ability to remain solid in the places that scare us," Herring says. She shows you how to stay with your writing when your mind and body begins to pull away. *Deep Writing* explores the connection between our heads and our bodies. Herring offers breath and body exercises throughout the book to help readers find the space between the inhalation and exhalation where deep writing lives.

Part Three, "Embracing What and Where You Are" explores that state when you've just finished your book, and the process of letting go. Here the author reminds us that "Everything that begins, ends... Working with impermanence will deepen your writing practice."

Herring ends each chapter with "Touchstones," imaginative exercises to inspire and discipline your own deep writing practice.

The final chapter, "Stillness," brings us to a resting place, the *Savasana* of writing practice. Seasoned yogis may find the guidance here quite basic, but it's important to remember that the art of letting go is essential to the writing process. Here Herring quotes her yoga teacher, "The world can turn without your help for just a moment."

Anyone who writes—or yearns to write—will find this book as essential as the breath.

Suza Francina is is author of The New Yoga for Healthy Aging and other books. She teaches at Sacred Space Studio in Ojai.

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