

Bonn Turkington

Baldonado-Ruiz

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Am I a Writer?

I began living in a world of stories very young. Shortly after my eighth birthday my father was injured in a serious accident. The results of the accident were countless surgeries, trips to the hospital and doctor's office, and a downward spiral in his health and wellbeing. Eventually, eight years later and just after my 16th birthday, he passed away, his body finally giving up.

In the eight years between his accident and death, whatever my young mind thought was normal was replaced with a new normal—trips to the hospital, problems with medication, a hospital bed in our living room, and financial ruin. Real life was a painful march through a wilderness of tribulation. I sought an escape. My only real outlets were games, movies, books, and stories.

I lived in a world of rich fantasy, often to the neglect of the real world. Real life was pain; imaginary life was everything I hoped. During sixth grade, around the time my mom was diagnosed with cancer and my dad was lying in a hospital bed in our living room, my grandmother took me to a parent/teacher conference at school. My teacher asked to see my grandmother alone.

“Bonn will never amount to anything; he's lazy, disorganized, and a distraction to the other kids”. I'm surprised my grandmother, my very animated and stubborn grandmother, didn't slap the man. After the conference she told me that was all he had to say about me. The conference didn't last long.

Where was I supposed to go if the real world couldn't accept me? My teacher wanted me to give up the imagined and live in the real—but little did he know the real was horrible. That moment was the beginning. Imagining the fantastic wasn't enough, I wanted to create something. Dungeons and Dragons

was a good start, and I became enamored with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Video games provided a means to create my own stories too.

Inspired by the fantasy stories I loved, the D&D epics my friends and I lived, and the need to find an escape, the imaginary became the real. Tolkien is still the master world builder, and taking cues from works like *The Silmarillion*, I, if not a bit precociously, said “why can’t I do the same? Why can’t I make my own world?” The stories took shape first as drawings—drawings of people and places that I had imagined regularly. Then followed short stories or descriptions of those people and places. Then came maps complete with the names of places, populations, geography, climate, and more. At first the characters and situations were piled onto paper just as they came to my mind and with no real focus. As the notebooks filled and I looked back over my work I was able to slowly piece together something cohesive.

Several years later, shortly after I graduated high school, a neighbor and family friend invited me to lunch. By this time my notebook scribblings had become a complete story—a full novel. Our neighbor, a man named Wayne who was a writer and publisher, had a copy of my book fall into his hands. And I say fell into his hands in the most passive voice possible because I don’t recall how he got a hold of any of my work. It must have been my mom’s doing—she was the only person who knew I was writing something. We met at the restaurant, exchanged brief pleasantries, were seated in a booth looking out the front of the building, and studied the menus in silence for a moment. Wayne broke the silence after deciding on a meal by asking all the usual questions about life—how school was, how my mom was, any plans for the rest of the year and so on. I answered everything honestly and we chatted a moment until the waiter arrived to take our orders. We both ordered, returned the menus, then sat back in our leather seats. A moment of silence followed. During the pause he looked me straight in the eyes.

“You have talent,” Wayne said. “You’re a good writer. I think you could do something with your writing if you really wanted to.” He then asked if I had ever considered writing professionally or pursuing a degree in English. The answers were both no.

He had the manuscript to my book, he read it, he liked it, and now he wanted me to consider writing as a career. While he didn't have a specific goal or path I should take, leaving that up to me, he offered his assistance and advice whenever and however I needed it.

Three years later I published that book and went on to write several more, a comic series, and develop an interactive website based around the book. An injury, an escape, a massive criticism, a creation, and a suggestion—I learned to read with my parents' help, I learned to create after my father's injury, I learned to prove people wrong in elementary school, I turned motivation into a story inspired by the great builders such as Tolkien, and I took a professional's advice to make reading and writing my own.