WHY I WRITE: THREE SNAPSHOTS

Snapshot One: I am sitting on my bed in a house in the Boston suburbs a late fall afternoon. I am 12, in 8th grade, and I have finished my homework so I can take out my notebook and begin to write. My older brother and sister have gone off to college, my father has gone to work in Maine, and my mother, who is slowly dying of cancer, has gone to take a nap. I have not gone anywhere. I am not going anywhere. I would like to go somewhere but I need to stay here in this house to help Mom. So instead I sit and write. I write because it helps me understand what is happening in my life now, a life that is confusing, a little scary, and blurry around the edges. I write to help bring the edges into focus, like the microscopes at school. It helps me to pin parts of my life down so I can see them and the connection between them more clearly. But most of all I write to create something new, something that is far more interesting than my bedroom on a late fall afternoon.

Snapshot Two: I have known forever that I want to major in Biology. I walk in the woods, I walk on the shore and there is so much I don’t know. What is that bird? That fish? That tree? This insect biting me? And why are they here? How do they live? So I major in Biology, first Honors then Masters and after gathering data for two years I sit to write a thesis on the timing, sequence, and behavior of migrating shorebirds. But what I write instead is poems because science just doesn’t capture it—flight and tides and the immense loneliness of sitting for hours for days for months watching slivers of silver wing unfold. And I want to capture it—the warm breathing bird that shits in my palm before I let it go. The lighthouse’s Cyclops roving eye. The fog that transforms gulls into ghosts.

Snapshot Three: Every day I write bits, poem bits, pages of bits, books of bits. Every couple of months I extract the best bits and type them onto my laptop. File of bits that I cut and paste, cut and paste grouping those that seem to go together, refer back to each other, bump each other creating a little buzz, a little heat. I love how bits of language do this, how they grab me and tug me along. I love how the bits begin talking to each other and I love to sit and listen to their snap, crackle, pop. And then the next phrase that follows, because there is always the next string of bits as they slowly begin to coalesce into what feels like some instrument I am trying to tune until it hums. It’s like I am following Orpheus out of a dark subway stop and I just keep writing and listening, hoping he won’t turn around.
WHY I WRITE: POEM

Because this wood was once an owl before it went AWOL.
Because the geese on the pond can't keep down their din.
Because the little girl is always left in the stroller while her brother gets to throw sticks in the mud.
Because nettles only appear to sting.
Because phrases connect like scrabble tiles, creating conversations.
Because chaos is my favorite of the Greek isles.
Because we're all God's little Oreos, cranked open and licked clean.
Because in memory all winters are one.
Because a tiger carries the stripes of long grasses with her even after the river has dried.
Because a squid can mimic a fish that mimics a squid.
Because we want more penuche, less marshmallow creme.
Because that is one hungry fox in my kitchen.
Because smoke rises when it's free of its fire.
Because with leather this soft who needs velvet.
Because your car stopped just inches from the quarry and those are your toys tumbling over the edge.
Because if you can't see my mirrors I can't hear your encore.