Why I Write
by Anoushka Dugar

I have many half-full notebooks in my room. Big glittery ones. Boring composition ones. Ones with a lock and key. Each has pages of scratched out pen or pencil and maybe my best attempt at cursive that day. Not a single one of my notebooks is full. Sometimes I question myself, wondering why I can never remain consistent and fill up the space of each page. But, my notebooks never judge me. Never condemn me for not returning to them. Whenever I have the urge to place my ideas down with my pen, the yellow lined pages always welcome me back.

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Honestly speaking, my desire to write had no smooth trajectory. Unlike my older brother, who at a young age was a voracious reader and writer, as a kid I would read and write with the same enthusiasm I had swallowing the fish oil my mom spoon-fed me daily. Words on pages would evoke hot tears from my eyes and I'd roll around on the floor, begging to not have to practice writing simple words. But, I loved hearing stories. During evenings after school, I'd lean against my mom's shoulder while she read, her bright and clear voice bringing books like *Elmer the Elephant*, *Rainbow Fish*, and *Peter Rabbit* to life. These works of writing didn't just create characters that added vibrancy to my active childhood imagination, these stories reinforced in me the value of friendship, integrity, and kindness, all of which became integral parts of my life. More than a decade later, as I approach the intimating title of "adult," I look at these picture books not only as a reader, but through the eyes of a writer. The authors of my favorite childhood books did something beautiful with their writing, because they made powerful lessons accessible to a younger audience through an imaginative format. Perhaps my childhood aversion to writing wasn't about words themselves — maybe it was because I didn't see their value just yet.

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I am by no means a perfect writer. I've never intended to be. I *am* an erratic writer. Months may go by before I write another poem, and I often write at hourly extremes — the latest parts of night and the earliest parts of day — motivated by my insatiable desire to express my feelings. When I write, I get a chance to nestle my ideas in a place I can return to. Sentences and paragraphs transform my jumbled ideas into a complete work. When I write, I can foster an external connection to my internal world.

Despite my early disdain towards writing, as time went by, I eased into my love for words bit by bit. A caring but stern second grade teacher who made us write short narratives everyday introduced me to the versatility of writing and the satisfaction of creating a polished product from my own thoughts. In the fourth grade, I met new friends, who influenced me to join them for lunch in the library. We'd sit under the air-conditioning and read next to one another under the small shelves, lost in our fantasy and dystopian worlds of the Hunger Games, Keeper of the Lost Cities, and the Land of Stories, while having the comfort of being next to one another. Later on, it wasn't until the seventh grade where I really began to think about myself as a writer. What started as writing poems and short stories for my creative writing class, turned into an activity I did wherever and whenever I could. During this period, I began to collect notebooks and journals to write in. They fed my love for something I once didn't even think I could love at all.

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Although I've learned different methods of writing, poetry is a language I understand, partly because I can apply my emotion so naturally into it. Because of this organic connection, I find myself returning to poetry again and again. This consistency has enabled me to focus on one skill and challenge my capabilities in this writing craft. I love that I can grow through technical challenges with line breaks, stanzas, and alliteration, while also having the freedom of unabashed expression.

My poetic influences are mainly inspired by memory and how it connects to my emotional state in some way — even the painful moments. Pain can be a very transformative emotion, and for me, writing has been a vessel to explore it.

I was fortunate to grow up near my grandparents and extended family. But when I turned five years old, I moved back to the U.S. Saying goodbye to the people you love isn't just emotionally painful, it's physically diminishing. I'll never be able to forget the feeling of my heart hanging in my chest as I looked out the foggy plane window on the flight home, watching as the city lights in India became smaller and smaller. Although the pain from the separation with them lingers in me, I've used writing to turn back to childhood memories and family life. The poems I write down in my notebooks or type away at my laptop aren't just tools to explore pain, they're paths to celebrate joy. The scents, sights, sounds, touches of my childhood and family have the chance to be expressed through imagery and narrative in my poems. Writing poems helps me recall my childhood memories and keep them alive and thriving on a page.

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I think it's a very brave thing to do, to pick up your pen and write. It takes courage to voice thoughts and bring attention to things one cares about, especially when we may feel like a just speck in the universe or a cog in a wheel. If I'm just a speck, well then I'm *my* speck and if I'm a cog in a wheel, I contribute something to my surroundings. Writing makes me feel like I matter.

While my emotional experiences are a key reason for why I write poetry, I have found personal meaning as a journalist in a different way. Journalists, I believe, have the duty to inform communities and bring issues left unseen to light. I feel a sense of purpose as a journalist. When I'm chipping away at an article exhausted from deadlines, I have to remind myself why I am writing these stories to rekindle my spark of purpose.

In sophomore year, I wrote a feature article about the lunch workers at school. Many of them had never even taken part in an interview before. I had some of the most profound conversations during those interviews. Full of smiles, laughs, and tender moments encountering their experiences with food insecurity and the early mornings they worked for their jobs. What seemed a simple feature story turned into something more. The article became a window into a group of people most people gloss over, unearthing meaningful experiences and lessons which could inspire people and bring attention to the unnoticed parts of the community. Articles like this shifted my attitude towards my writing, because they showed me the possibility of using my voice as a platform to help make the voices of others heard.

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In a way, I think writing in two distinctly different styles has helped me develop skills that intersect. The quiet reflection and creative liberties I take in poetry translate to making seemingly boring

news articles come to life. Conversely, the structure and analysis necessary for interviews and journalism teach me to look through a different lens when I'm writing poems.

In today's polarized and convenience-driven atmosphere, where intake and output of information is rapidly changing, be it through technological advancement or increased division, now more than ever human skills of thinking, feeling, creating — even imperfect things — matter to our own personal development. My writing is influenced by my experiences and emotions, but also the duties I feel I must uphold, all of which have contributed significantly to my personal development. Amidst the constant noise of perfection, where writing is viewed as another skill which needs to be manufactured, having the confidence in one's authentic unique voice is incredibly powerful. The fact that no one else can replicate your writing, or talk about your experiences the way that you can isn't just an empowering fact; I believe it's a testament to how our voices in writing are a critical part of our autonomy.

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I could call myself an aspiring poet, a student-journalist, or an English student, but at my core, I am a writer. And to this day I sometimes struggle with calling myself one. But then, I return to all my notebooks, dusty in my room and half-full. Reading through them, I am reminded of the bravery it took to write in them. I know I can always pick up my pen and return to my thoughts tucked away among the lines of my notebook pages. That they aren't half-empty, but rather waiting to be filled.