Cultural Daily

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18 Years, But Who's Counting?

Judith Teitelman · Wednesday, April 24th, 2019

When people learn that my debut novel, *Guesthouse for Ganesha*, is on the precipice of publication, there's typically an outpouring of kind and generous accolades: "that's so wonderful," "what an accomplishment," and "I'm very happy for you." All said with exclamation points.

Then, the inevitable question: "How long have you been working on it?"

Widened eyes, twitching heads and, more often than not, stunned silence follows when they learn that my journey traverses 18 years. This, finally broken by comments like "you're kidding?" or "wow, really?" With more exclamation points.

"Why did it take that long?" they always ask, almost accusatorily, as though there was something wrong. Unaware that the length of time it took me to reach this point is not exceptional in the literary world. Most especially for a first-time novelist.

My response?

Well, what I want to say is what I truly believe: "Time is illusory and ephemeral. An abstract concept not grounded in constructs or form; something that has changed over history and geography." (Sidebar: I teach Time Management for Artists, among other topics.)

But I most commonly reply with "I spent nearly eleven years, betwixt and between consulting and teaching and travel and daily life, writing—and then rewriting—and then rewriting some more—my novel. This was followed by the search for my literary agent, which took an additional year and seven months—'the fast track,' I learned from numerous fellow writers. Then, another three plus years to find my ideal publisher, and nearly two years to publication from there."

Writing—and finishing—a novel, and then undertaking the necessary efforts to get it out in the world is not for those who thrive on and demand immediate gratification—those for whom even emails are too slow. I hear tales such as mine all the time, often from writers who toiled years longer before their book was published.

I'm really yet another 'Accidental Novelist.' I never intended to write fiction. I've always been a good writer—my exceptional high school English teacher ensured that—and I have a lifetime of papers, reports, proposals, and articles that I've authored, many of which have been published in various professional journals in different formats—paper, online, etc. Yet, I never had the desire to be a creative writer.

But life's journeys take us in a myriad of different directions—often to places we don't anticipate or imagine. Essentially that's what happened to me in 2001. A dear friend started a new writers' group on Saturday mornings and, basically, dragged me into it. And I hated it. But I showed up—every Saturday morning at 10am with my soy latte in one hand and my notebook and pens in the other. Because I committed and I honor my commitments.

It was there that I discovered that this story had been percolating within me for a very long time. In the first month or so of those Saturday mornings, I realized that I had a title in my head. A title I didn't understand and had no idea of its origin. I spent quite a few Saturdays trying to understand it, to decipher it. Until a friend's passing led me to an old journal of mine where I found an inscription (nothing leading up to it; nothing of significance noted after) dated 25 June 1983 that read: The title is Guesthouse for Ganesha. Needless to say, I was shocked.

At that moment I surrendered. Fully. I knew there was a story that had to be told.

I continued to show up nearly every Saturday morning for four years to dig, delve, and explore the title and the story it headlined. And a novel did emerge. A story that surprised and compelled me; one, of which, I'm immensely proud. During the ensuing seven years, I committed two days a week to work on it.

Throughout, I wrote for me. To honor that journal entry. And to honor the process, and how it was meant to unfold. It didn't matter how long it was or wasn't taking. There was no deadline. Only deep curiosity. The upshot—be it consciously or unconsciously—was relentless determination, along with stamina, stick-to-it-ness, faith, and, on occasion, patience, drove my novel's development.

Somewhere along the way I understood this story was bigger than me and I had to respect its evolution. It's clear to me that if I had rushed to finish, the novel would in no way be of the quality or caliber I intended and strived for. This was not a story to rush, but one to marinate.

Besides, I never had interest in writing full time. I love my consulting and clients in the nonprofit arts and cultural arena, and I love teaching. I had no intention of stopping either to sit alone in a room full time and, of course, I still needed to earn a living. I've been fortunate in my adult life to do the work I'm most passionate about. Writing is now woven into it all, like a beautiful, inspiring, layered textile.

I've learned so much in this process: most importantly to take the long view—the longer it took me to complete this novel, the better I became at my craft. Along the way, I was able to see my novel with fresh eyes, providing critical opportunities for reflection. My confidence and faith in my work expanded. I knew, without a doubt, that I was on the right path towards fully realizing the story that I was meant to write.

So much in life is about time and timing.

And now is the perfect time for *Guesthouse for Ganesha* to be published and get out into the world. There is no such thing as being too late.

As Confucius said:

It does not matter how slowly you go, so long as you do not stop.

Guesthouse for Ganesha is available at Indiebound and Amazon.

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