

How to Find Your Voice as an Author!

A brief introduction. My name is Micah Campbell, and I wrote a book called *Urban Legends, Ghost Stories, and Folklore* and released it in January of '22. It was and has been relatively successful, on a small scale, of course, but it has sold around 3,000 copies and still sells maybe 2 or 3 a week... not bad.

I don't do ANY kind of promotion for it... I probably should, but with my involvement in Anatolian Press, my personal work has taken quite the back seat.

I'm married with 3 children, 2 girls and a boy. I was in a punk band throughout the late 90s and early 2000s and did some touring, got on some magazines, we were being played overseas and actually had a record contract with Orange County Records, and then our jerk guitar player met a girl, and got married and the band dissolved. As fate would have it, that jerk guitar player was me.

Ah, love, right?

OK, so that's a bit about me.

This is what I wish to explore today. Let's view it as an encouragement, an exhortation even: **In your writing, just as in life, embrace your authentic and unequivocal self.**

Writing has been a part of my life in some form for as long as I can remember. I'm sure many of you can relate. Short stories, ambitious attempts at epic high fantasy (though perhaps beyond my capabilities at the time), and more. I never ventured into fan fiction, but my experience as a Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Master has given me some top-notch world-building skills. I've been writing for a substantial period, and over time, I'd like to believe my writing has improved significantly. And ultimately, that's what truly counts.

Yet, there comes a point where writing takes over. It's a constant presence in your thoughts. New ideas, hooks, characters – they're ever-present. Strangely, writing them down doesn't always happen; after all, you've become a writer, and we writers will go to great lengths to avoid the keyboard, right? Some of you might argue, "That's not me. I write every day." Well, good for you. As for me, I own it – I AM a writer, an author, and, I must admit, a procrastinator. Deal with it. It's par for the course.

So, I realized that I was a writer, right? Well, NOW it means a little more to me that I'm the only one that knows I'm a good writer. I want others to know. I want to share my stories. I want to use this talent, this skill, this passion to bring joy to others. I want to be on bookshelves. In magazines. In anthologies. I never really cared about the money. I don't think we do this for the money. And if you do, eh, good luck.

But...

That's kind of where I'm going with this:

In 2011 a little book dropped by an author I had never heard of before: E.L. James. James was an unknown in the most literal sense. Until her debut novel, *50 Shades of Grey*, exploded onto the scene, she hadn't written a single thing, save 2 fan fiction stories on fanfiction.net. She says that she watched the *Twilight* movies, then became obsessed with the books, then wrote *50 Shades*.

Kill me now.

50 Shades of Gray has sold over 15 million copies, spawned a trilogy (and a movie trilogy) and sent James to the top of *Time Magazine* and *Publisher's Weekly* as most influential author of the year.

Wow.

In 2011, I bought *50 Shades of Grey*. I had to see what I was missing. I had to know what a REAL author knows that I don't know. I had to see what I was doing wrong.

I opened the book, and started reading, ready to take it all in.

Teach me, sensei!

I got 3 pages in. That was it.

Look, I'm not going to talk crap on any author. We're all on the same team. James followed her passion, and she's being rewarded for it. Good for her. I'm happy for her.

But I'll tell you what... I don't need to see hands, but have you read it? If you've read it, you know what I'm talking about... heck, even if you enjoyed it, you know what I'm talking about.

Funny story, I did the same thing with Twilight. It was a phenomenon, and I had to know what I was doing wrong and what they were doing right.

Side note, I got through 3 chapters before I put that one down.

Just... No.

Here's the takeaway:

The best writers are not always the big sellers.

So, what, then?

What am I supposed to do when I want to get my work out there, I think I'm a decent writer, I know I'm a better writer than half the authors out there making bank... what do I do?

Well, in 2011, for a brief moment, the answer was - to write dirty, kinky romance stuff.

I mean, even now, romance is the #1 selling fiction genre, right?

So why not? Do I like romance? No. Have I ever read romance... not all the way through. But that's what sells! So, why not? That's what I was going to do.

There's a hilarious line in Sandra Bullock's new movie, *The Lost City*. She plays a romance author, a successful romance author, and Channing Tatum is gushing over her at one point, telling her how good of a writer she is and how special she is, and she responds with something like, "Oh, just come up with 14 euphemisms for sex and 6 different names for a man's thing and you can be a romance author, too."

Now, obviously, that was a joke, and I'm not belittling or criticizing romance authors; they're doing what they love, but I love Dragons!

I love magic, elves, swords, and unicorns, spooky things and monsters and blood and action and epic battles... I like fantasy, and I like horror.

I don't like romance.

Yet, I started writing a romance novel... not just any romance novel... I started writing a story that would put 50 Shades to shame.

It was filthy! It was so filthy that I had to lock the file, just to make sure no one read it. But it was also *good*. I was surprised at how good it actually was. But about 20-thousand words in, after the initial excitement, or challenge of writing in this genre wore off, I just stopped. I was done.

I couldn't do it anymore.

I felt like a fraud, like a swindler. Like I was faking it, which I was...

It also dawned on me that I would **DEFINITELY** have to use a pseudonym because I could **NEVER** let my mom know that I wrote it!

OH MY GOSH, can you imagine!?!

Why do I bring this up?

Why do I exhume long-buried debacles that are better left forgotten?

Well, for laughs, first of all... I mean, it's a pretty funny story.

But also because it shows me at a time in my writing journey when I didn't know what I know now.

And that is, above all else, ***be true to you.***

No matter what.

Thus, FINALLY: **How do we sell our story without selling our souls?**

Today, I want to discuss the 3 secret weapons that will separate you from everyone else. I'm not going to discuss anything technical here. There are a million lectures, classes, and even YouTube videos out there on the technical aspects of writing.

What I want to touch on is something that I think is just as important, if not, dare I say, more **importanter**... and that is what comes from the inside. The things that are not learned or taught, but the things that are innate to you.

Your **voice**, your **experiences**, and your **originality**.

Those are what will separate you from everyone else.

Let's talk about...

Your Voice

But before we talk about what your voice IS, let's make sure we know what it IS NOT.

It is NOT your technical prowess. It is not how many big words you know or how much of a grasp you have on grammatical rules. It has nothing to do with how you structure your writing. A robot could do these things - in fact, a robot has done these things. We all know about AI and ChatGPT and all that by now. So, no, none of these things are what give you your voice.

Again, look at 50 Shades... whew.

What your voice IS, is the way you perceive and process the world around you.

It's your unique way of translating or distilling the information, the stories, or the feelings that you're then putting down on paper.

No one else can do that like you can.

Let me say it again, for those in the back...

No one else can do that like you can. Period.

If I gave you an exotic drink or sat you down in front of a beautiful sunset and asked you to describe it to me, would you describe it the same way that I would? No, of course not. We might hit on a few of the same tangible elements, but our description would be our own.

Why? Because our experiences speak to us all differently.

You would describe it based on how you perceive it.

You are the filter that we (the readers) will see YOUR world through. There's only one you, which means there's only one filter.

THAT, I believe, is what makes your voice. And that is your first secret weapon.

Are there technical or learned things that we can add to that to make our voice stronger? Eh, I don't know.

One could argue that reading more and writing more, getting a more solid foundation of grammar, etc. would strengthen your voice, but I don't know that I would agree.

It would *strengthen* your writing, and I think that is absolutely necessary, but strengthen your voice? I don't know... I almost want to say I don't think so. I think your voice is innately you. It can't be learned or taught.

It can be found, though... and that leads me to number 2.

Your Experience

Now, let's get this out there right off the bat, I am NOT saying that you need to experience something before you can write about it. I mean you can't experience vampires, or Minas Tirith, or mystical fantasy realms. Most of us may never even be able to experience some of the amazing things in this realm of existence, but that doesn't mean we can't write about them.

No, you don't HAVE to have experienced something to write about it, and you don't need experience (as in "time-served") to tell a story - case in point: E.L. James. Never written before to BAM international success.

See how it all comes together? Man, I'm good.

It's your experiences in life that have formed and informed your way of thinking, of processing, of relating to the things around you.

No one knows what you've experienced, what you've been through, or how you went through it.

And I'm not talking about anything so grand as trauma or loss or the like, though we've all experienced that in one way or another.

I'm talking about everyday life: Going to school, riding the bus, talking with friends, taking a walk, childhood adventures, yes, trauma and loss fit here, too, but they are pieces to the whole of you.

There is only one you and only you have experienced your life.

That experience is **KEY** to your voice, and to your writing. It can't be learned and no one else has it. Talk about a secret weapon, right?

So, you have your **VOICE** and you have your **EXPERIENCES**... Two things no one else in the ENTIRE universe has! What happens when we put those two things together?

Well, you get number 3:

Your Originality

This is where you break out, right? This is where you go all super sayan and start slaying.

Can you hear a song on the radio, and just by the mix, or tone, or voice, know exactly what band or artist it is?

How about a book, or an article? Can you instantly tell just by the prose, who wrote it.

This is where we want to be and this can't be taught or learned... because it is already inside of you... it IS you!

For my book, Urban Legends, Ghost Stories, and Folklore, the number one comment I get from readers is how much they felt like I was sitting right there next to them, telling them a story as they read it.

And, subsequently, everything that I have written since then has had the exact same tone, whether an article on mental health or a horror or fantasy story. And readers seem to really like it.

There are a few that don't, and that's cool. I didn't write it for them.

Do I intentionally write this way? No.

But when I combine my voice with my experiences - when I put things through my filters and distill and percolate them to the reader, what we get is 100 percent me.

Now is that enough to "make it big"? I don't know; only time will tell, but I can tell you that I have never been happier with what I write than when I am being true to myself. I found my voice and combined that with my experiences, I developed MY **originality**, and I've never looked back.

If you are true to number one (your voice) and number two (your experiences), your readers will instantly get it. It'll just click. They will KNOW it's YOU writing. They will FEEL you with every word. You will be in every strand of your book's DNA.

Your authenticity, your tone, your cadence, your rhythm... it'll be all over that book. It will feel so natural and comfortable that your readers won't even be able to say why, but every time they pick up something written by you, they'll know immediately that it is 100 percent, original authentic YOU.

I truly believe that this is the secret sauce to great writing.

Everything else will come with time, but you must get THIS down. And once you do, you will be unstoppable.