

My summer vacation

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B Y L E E L Y N C H

I've been exhausted for ten years. That's how long it's been since I started writing fiction steadily, without a break. Even in the year that I was ill for six months, moved cross country, ended a thirteen-year relationship, began a new one and two new jobs, I wrote sporadically.

T H E



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cally, whenever I felt I would go nuts if I didn't. Some call it workoholism. I called it necessity.

Still, one gets tired. I decided to take this month off — between *Dusty's Queen of Hearts Diner* and the next book. I'm

still doing columns and book reviews and research for the new book and, of course, my job, but my pace has slowed to a state I can experience as vacation.

During this break I've been able to muse about the source of my exhaustion. How did it all start, this merry-go-round of writing, touring, working all the harder for a living to make up for the time I take out to write? I know it was about September of 1979 that I enrolled in a Yoga class and stopped eating meat. I was trying to change my life in a positive way. That November I saw a chiropractor for tendonitis. He told me to stop doing alcohol, caffeine and processed foods. After all, I'd stopped smoking — I could handle the rest. By about February of 1980 I'd even eased off a twenty-three year tranquillizer diet.

But I need to go back even further than that, to the change that made room in my life for all this health consciousness. I have to go back to *Rocky*.

Now, I know this will sound strange. I know it's totally inappropriate for a lesbian writer to have found inspiration for her renewed career at the movies, especially *that* movie, but there are extenuating circumstances. This was before my life-changing trip to the chiropractor who is the

same man who discovered my allergy to corn. One of the effects corn has on my system is to heighten my emotions. You know, at a sad movie, I get hysterical and cry my heart out; at a comic movie I become euphoric. Why at the movies? Popcorn. I'm an American. I loved to consume popcorn at the movies. Plus, there's some direct relationship between allergy and addiction which I don't quite understand. It's likely that I not only ate this poison in theaters, but that I indulged in an intemperate manner.

So there I was watching *Rocky*. Corn fumes wafted like invisible San Francisco fog around me. I fed myself more. Sylvester Stallone was on the screen, bigger than life, an underdog just like me — well, maybe not *just* like me — but he was a boxer who hadn't made it, I was a writer in the same situation. Then, through sheer gumption and courage, *Rocky* transforms himself into a winner. He stood atop those famous steps, jumping up and down like a fool, and I, whipped even further into a vulnerable high by this visual challenge and the feverishly inspirational music, identified completely with him. If *Rocky* Balboa could do it, then so could this little dyke whose mission was certainly more important than *Rocky's*. I flexed my literary biceps, my linguistic pectorals. I would do for other lesbians what Jane Rule and Isabelle Miller had done for me: given me hope and a view of the lesbian world through glasses untainted by doom. I would give writing one more try.

By October of 1977 I had switched from a job which required my presence at least ten hours each day, to one where I worked thirty-five hours a week. I began then, with *Rocky*-like courage, to train my imagination, build my writing skills, and most of all to build up discipline until I used every available minute for my writing. I bussed to work so I could plot stories as I commuted. I found ways to get my job done in fewer hours so that I could write lesbian fiction at my desk. I scheduled time with friends and with my lover. Sick days at work I hoarded to whip out stories. Sleep I cut back so badly that I developed insomnia. When I did go to bed, I'd put myself to sleep plotting stories, only to wake myself up and write them down. Not a moment or an ounce of energy was wasted. It all, worthy or not, went into lesbian literature.

What drove me? I was frightened, almost literally to death, of not finishing what I wanted, needed to, before my clock ran out and death, or homophobia, stopped me for good.

At first, I didn't understand that I was

wearing myself out. I was so very happy to be writing again, believed so avidly in my cause, that it was a new intoxication: I felt no pain. As the years wore on, though, I had no energy for normal human endeavors like housecleaning or relationships. I called myself lazy, felt fatigued, blamed it on growing old, on gruesome diseases, learned to meditate. Nothing seemed to help. My health broke down, finally, from the overwork and other causes, but when I recovered, I was right back in that ring slugging it out with time and energy.

Then, a couple of months ago, I went to the dentist. He told me about a lecture given by a former NASA physician who'd been on the scene when death felled a series of NASA engineers. Foul play was suspected, but research revealed overwork to be the villain. These professionals, whether from competitiveness, passion or workoholism, ran on adrenalin highs. All joggers, they kept that jogging high in everything they did, pacing themselves, as it turned out, beyond human endurance.

This disturbed me, but then came the clincher. Girlfriend, whom most of you know as Tee Corinne, artist, art critic, lecturer, has been finishing a book of erotic prose and poetry called *Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex*. (To be released this fall by Banned Books.) Suddenly, I was the one living with a writer — the tables, or tablets, were turned. The day I realized I'd been watching Tee act out my behavior patterns I just laughed. How in the world could she *stand* to live with me when I'm working? I mean, artists have their crazies, too, but the transformation of a human being into a writer is just plain scary.

We act stubborn, are not terribly sensible, let our priorities get all topsy-turvy, obsess to the point of living out characters' lives, drive ourselves beyond exhaustion and go half-crazed with the effort of balancing an impossible number of thematic, plot and character threads in our teeny human brains. And always, that terror of not having enough time, that race against silence before the words are all said.

No wonder I — and Tee — are exhausted. I'm hoping this break will teach me something about balancing myself. Though I'm scared I'll never be able to pick up the thread of writing again afterward, that my discipline will collapse, that I'll be unable to function without the adrenalin engine revving, that I'll run out of time — I'm more scared of running out of life. What tragic irony, should any of us die trying to outrun death, or its equivalent for the gay writer, the grim censor.



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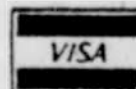


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