

Precious Time (Originally written in 2016)

That's what my writing life is, precious time. Like a lot of other writers, my writing has to fit around being a wife, a mother of three teenagers, and (up until now) working full time. My mother-in-law also lives with us. I get up at six every morning and leave the house just after half seven; I'm at my desk for eight. My lunch hour is a sandwich at my desk, and when I get home, after I've cooked the tea etc etc etc, there's not much of my brain left to be honest.

So far, so not telling you anything you didn't already know, because for a lot of us writers, life is just like that, or an equally every second of every day filled up variant of the above. And yet we write books. Books get written and published every day, so how do we do it? Well, the simple answer is because we can't imagine not doing it, and the day you decide that you're going to write, and never give up, will be the day you take your first steps on the road to being a writer. And you'll find a way, you'll find the time, just as you find the time to shop, cook meals, clean, supervise homework, read, walk, or any of the other things that take up your time.

When I first started writing *Letting in Light* I didn't have access to any of the technology that I do now. It was written, longhand, in about 15 notebooks, all of which I still have. When I'd finished the first draft I had to type it all up, all 120,000 words of it before I could even begin to make it book shaped, and it nearly killed me... But, I did it. And from there it got easier. I still write longhand now, not all the time, but sometimes it's the only practical way of getting things down, and even if you only have twenty minutes at a time, you'll end up with a few hundred words, which, by the end of the week, might add up to be a few thousand words, in a month, maybe ten thousand words... And in six months, you'll have written the best part of a book, and all from twenty minutes a day. Just write, just do it.

The other hugely important thing I learned this year, was to take myself seriously as a writer, and allow myself to be one. Sounds obvious, doesn't it? But it's so easy to think that what you do doesn't matter in the grand scheme of things. I never had a defined writing space before; our PC is in the lounge, along with people and the TV, and everyone uses it. So I saved up and bought a tiny laptop and used this instead. But the table is in the kitchen so I always had to clear it away for meal times etc, and sometimes, when I didn't have long to write, it almost wasn't worth getting out at all. My notebooks were better because these were more portable, but I still had to clear them away, along with all my notes, planners and post it notes etc. My epiphany came as recently as July when I was travelling home on the train from the RNA conference in London. *Letting in Light* was beginning to sell well, and having spent a wonderful weekend in the company of other writers, I suddenly realised that I was one, and if I was going to get anywhere I had to start behaving like one and take myself seriously.

As soon as I got home, I wandered around our house looking for a spot to transform and I now have a little writing cave. It's under the stairs, small, and I'm in the middle of all the house traffic, but it's mine, and I love it, and more importantly it works.

So, I said right at the beginning of this post, that up until recently I was working full time. My ultimate writing goal has always been to make my living from it, to be in a position to write full time, and so at the end of July I renegotiated my contract at work down to four days a week. When I go back next week after the holidays I will have a full day just to write and I'm unbelievably excited by this. Yes, our family income will reduce, but we'll survive, and I need to give myself this opportunity.

My dream also came a whole step closer in the last week of August, as out of the blue both an agent and an editor contacted me in the same week. I've just been signed to the LAW agency by the wonderful Peta Nightingale, and have a firm offer to publish from one party and have had early conversations with another. My life as a writer has suddenly taken off in a way I never thought would happen. And if it can happen to me, it can happen to you. But only if you write... one word, and then another, and another. So just do it. Do it now!