

Notebooks: Do You Have a PROBLEM?

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SPEAKER

Mur Lafferty

Mur 0:00

This is I Should Be Writing season 17 episode 11. My name is Mur Lafferty and this is I Should Be Writing, the podcast for wannabe fiction writers streaming live on Twitch and YouTube. Hello to everybody in the chat. You can either see this live, or you can download it in my stream at murverse.com. Or you can get the earlier version on Patreon. Patreon.com/mightymur. Anyway, my new routine has gotten me actually still productive. That's five weekdays in a row, starting last Wednesday. In studying the whole queue-habit-reward cycle, I kept going further and further backwards from writing first thing in the morning to see what my strategy needs to be to write first thing in the morning and I realized it starts with doing the dishes. I don't know. And this is not to write overall, this is just to write first thing in the morning. I do the dishes and then the kitchens clean for me to make my coffee, and set up everything for breakfast. I can get the dogs' food ready, and then I can get up early, take care of coffee and dogs, and then I can write. It's a very strange, strange connection in my mind but since I started with the doing the dishes and then the pattern continues, it's been working. So this morning, I got another hunk of my project done. I'm four fifths of the way through. One more day, one more script, should be done, crossing fingers. So what's funny is, this morning I actually tried to prepare for the podcast a little bit while I was on break from writing, and I went into YouTube, YouTube thumbnail program, and made a nice thumbnail because I realized that right before you go live is not the time to set up your thumbnail. And I set up the album art for today's episode. And I was so proud of myself. And then I went into the discord and talk started talking to people about what I was going to talk about today and I got off on a big tangent. And I think I started wondering if I was talking about the right thing because clearly there was something else on my mind, which I'll get to on Thursday. But clearly I picked the right topic, because the conversation went on for quite some time after that.

Mur 3:15

And the question is: notebooks, do you have a problem? I have a problem. I have a big problem. I can quit notebooks anytime I want to. And I totally believe you Sario. Entirely. But let's see Fyrrerider has a stack. I journal with fairly regular frequency so I don't feel bad about buying pretty notebooks for future journals. For a long time it was the potential that notebooks gave. On one hand I don't write my fiction longhand. You know, I type it out. I make a lot of notes longhand, but I scribble. My handwriting is atrocious. And so I did not feel like, I mean I've gotten hand sewn blank books from audience members that it just, I could not and they specifically told me don't worry about writing in this because it's meant to be written in. And I'm just thinking about my horrible handwriting or what brilliant thought could I come up with to grace these pages and that one is still not much written in it. Oftentimes I will start using them for lists, often grocery lists, and then a couple of months later, I'll pick up a journal that cost me like \$21 and look and see my grocery list inside and wonder why. Why did I do that? And I think it's all what it represents to us. It's the potential. There's some really nice notebooks out there. Well made, solid, not going to rip. There's some that are lined. There's some with little dots, which is the crack for bullet journal fans.

Mur 5:18

My problem is I tried to separate the journals. Like I have one by my bedside and several on my desk and a couple on the kitchen table. And since COVID I've moved all my recording into the guest room so now I have two desks. I have the desk I record at and the desk I write at which is down the hall. And so now we've got some notebooks that have wandered in here. Part of it also is my inability to get a good planning system going. Bullet journal, diaries that lay out your days that you're supposed to fill out, diaries that only halfway lay out your days. There's so many. And they all claim to fix all your problems. And so far, none of them have. I think my biggest problem, if I'm going to spend my spending money on notebooks, that's on me. But where it gets to be literally harmful is when I take important notes on something, and then I don't remember which notebook the important notes were in. I won't say what project just in case anybody who's either worked with me on it or read it is happening to be listening or watching. But there was one project where I would go over edits on the phone and I would write down everything that was said, but I wouldn't get to the edits right away. And when it came time to actually work on the edits, I could not remember or find what notebook I put them in.

Mur 7:05

That's where it gets dangerous. Okay dangerous is a little too much. No one's getting hurt. There's no missile codes locked away in these books. But they're all so shiny. This one is just, it's like a lined to-do list, with numbers on one side and little circles on the other that you could fill in, and it's perforated so you can just tear it out, take it with you. Had to get that one. Then there's the daily diary my mom got me. Then there's this one, which is black. And you can get these gel pens to write on it, and then it looks really pretty. I got a problem. So we got the traveler's notebook system helps me with using up the notebooks because I can easily carry on four or five at once. Is that the one with like a folder with a couple of notebooks inside. I think I know what that is. My notebook is either on my phone or in a dozen Word documents. See that's an option. But for me, I got to be able to write stuff down. Brainstorming just comes a lot easier for me with writing by hand. Every once in a while, I will go through all of my

notebooks, and I will take the ones that are important, and keep them together. And I'll take the ones that I've started and not really done much in and I'll usually tear those pages out. And so I'll at least have a whole bunch of clear notebooks to start off with. But finishing a notebook, putting something on every single page is something I've never experienced. No, I have experienced it, but it's so rare. I'm a professional writer, I'm in my 40s. You think it would have happened more often by now.

Mur 9:08

I think it all comes down to the potential though. You buy a fresh notebook and you can put anything inside. Anything. But then you brainstorm a weird story and then put your grocery list in and now it's tainted. But the next notebook. That one. That one has all the potential to keep all of your brilliant ideas. You know, people went through Octavia Butler's notebooks and got a lot of her stuff. And a lot of writers got really emboldened by the notes that she wrote to herself. And sometimes I think about that and I just feel bad. I'll never be Octavia Butler. I know that. But, anybody coming across my morning pages or my lists, or even if you find the notes on my books that people really liked, it's gonna be a jumbled mess. And after all these notebooks, I made so many scene by scene notes on post-its so I could see how the scenes fit together and move them around if I needed to. So I think what we need to get out of this, and I hate it because buying yourself a shiny new journal is also just a little bit of shopper's therapy, let's be honest. It feels so good to get a new notebook. And they got the little ones and they got the really big ones. But I'm terrified of the idea of anybody finding my notes after I'm dead. I should probably tell my husband to burn them. Because any respect anybody would have built for me as a writer would be gone. Absolutely gone. Indigoquill says I have trouble keeping a journal while doing morning pages since I see them as kind of the same. Does anyone have that issue if they've done the artist's way? Oh yeah, I'm bad at keeping a journal anyway. And I think I have really internalized some trust issues from somebody reading my diary when I was younger, so I don't journal. And when I can force myself to do the morning pages that's as close to journaling as I get. So I don't know anybody who does like journaling and mourning pages. I think they're really the same thing. Unless you like doing journaling at night. I think if you become a writer, then someone may be interested in your notebooks academically. Again, not gonna learn much. And if they were to they probably couldn't read it anyway. I sometimes can't read my writing.

Mur 12:06

If I'm doing the morning pages, I will dedicate one whole notebook to that because that's not something you want to be flipping through when you're looking for, say, the list of your pets' medication or something. I started to do the artist's way but I gave it up. When did you start it, Anne and how far in did you get and why'd you give it up? I'm always fascinated by this. I usually run out of steam around weeks, five or six. And in doing finding water. Somebody else had warned me that finding water was her more religious focused system and I hadn't seen that yet and then I got into the middle of the program and I started seeing a lot more of it. And then of course, I've ranted about this before, there's the good old week without media. And she doesn't call it that. She says a week without reading. And that is where I get the feeling that she thinks she's writing the artist's way for people who can dedicate all of their time to the artist's way. You know, if you were doing a retreat, you were doing an entire retreat for the artist's way, sure, you could take a week and just have your thoughts. No reading, no TV, no

nothing. Just have your thoughts. Living your daily life, that's not possible. If you're a student, if you're most people who work, it's not just the deprivation. It's email and breaking news. I mean, can you imagine somebody on January 6 going, oh, people are storming the capitol to stop the new president? Hmm, well I'm not going to catch up on that because I'm having my artist's way reading deprivation week. I don't know, it just feels like if you wanted to go sit in the woods and meditate, if you're the kind of person that goes sit in the woods and meditate. I'm not saying that's a bad thing. I know people who do that, then the reading deprivation sounds possible, if you can dedicate your whole week to that. But living your life, being aware of what's going on around you doing your job, that's a lot to ask.

Mur 14:31

And I always get very annoyed with week four. And it's like every time I've read about it in her subsequent updates to the book it's like every time I bring this up, everybody says they can't do it and I say yes you can. You have to and I can't remember exactly what word she uses. But essentially it's no she came up with this, like no reading concept in... When did she write the artist's way? I don't know, my copy is in the other room. But it was decades ago, before the internet was mainstream. Definitely before the internet lived in your pocket. So, it's not even like phone addiction. It is actual communication. I mean, what are you going to do? Your husband's like, Hey, I forgot my car keys or I forgot my wallet. Can you bring them to me? Well I can't get that message dear because I'm on reading deprivation. I mean it's just privileged. That is a very good name for it. Yeah, I think if I were to do the reading deprivation week, I would probably cut media, and books. And it would be hard but I would not say I cannot read anything. Artists way was written in 1992. See? It's a lot easier to say don't read anything in '92. But I think the biggest problem for me with the notebooks, the whole idea of keep something by your bed, in case you come up with any ideas going to sleep or when you wake up in the middle of the night and keep the morning pages at the kitchen table, so I can go downstairs and get my coffee and write. And I got to keep another notebook there because if I come up with anything that I actually need for the day, I'll need to write it in that notebook. And see? See how they start to multiply like tribbles. I don't know. I was kind of hoping I would come up with some sort of like, so we all have a problem, here's what we do and I don't know. One way I've been able to keep up with things is, hopefully... Of course this doesn't have one, of course it doesn't. You mean none of mine do in here? Okay, no this one does. A lot of notebooks will now come with a little pocket in them. And I've discovered say, if I write something down on a straight piece of paper that I need to save and I don't have the time or whatever to put it into whatever notebook is my main notebook, I'll slip it in that little pocket and hope I don't forget about the pocket. But I think having one of those is a good way of managing all of this.

Mur 17:25

As glorious and beautiful and solid, and as much as these make you feel like a real writer, for me I think the covers are what makes me lose things because I just look and I see a whole bunch of different colored notebooks and I don't know which is which. But if I wrote things just on a piece of cheap paper, on a legal pad, then it would be easier to keep track of. So I have started using a legal pad for some of my notes. But pens are pretty. Yes. When you go down the fountain pen route you get so many nice colored inks. I love fountain pens but I finally stopped buying them when I realized I don't use them enough to where every time I want to

use them, I have to get the ink moving again. And that's really irritating. I hesitate to tell you this, because a lot of people in chat are talking about their pen addiction. There is a stationery subscription box. You can either go the paper and pen route or just the pen route. I did the paper and pen route. And while all the stationery they sent me was nice, it was like sending me a journal that was very pretty but the insides were just stuff that I didn't need. Like a little post-it stack with a habit tracker on it that I never ever, ever, ever used. And fancy executive desk memo things. And I think I got a protractor in one or whatever. Protractor is the one that looks like the rainbow. Whatever the one that looks like the right triangle is. Whatever that one is. I got a gold one of those. Anyway, so I cut it down to just the pens, and while it was so exciting to get that pen delivery every month. I stopped because a) the pens started to pile up for obvious reasons, and b) when I found a pen I really liked, they didn't give you any information on how to find them to get more. And a lot of them were, I think Japanese, because they had a little sticker on them with Japanese writing on it. But it would not give you any sort of info and search for silver pen with a textured body. I mean, how do you search for a pen on the internet? So that was kind of irritating because, you know, if you find something you really like to write with, you want to keep using it and I didn't have that option. So those are the two reasons why I quit the pen subscription box but I love subscription boxes because they are like Christmas.

Mur 20:16

You know what you're getting, and you're paying for it yourself but you don't know what you're getting and that's so exciting. Warning, I will put the pen subscription information into the show notes, with apologies. I've also been annoyed with fountain pens because when I'm looking really quickly for a pen to write with, and I grab a fountain pen with no ink or dried up ink, that's frustrating too. Yeah, going back to the artist's way I tried to do it again last year, and got bogged down with COVID. I haven't caught it. Just existential horribleness of 2020. Someday I'll finish finding water again. Someday I will. But right now, one of my coaching accountability goal club things just ended, but my other one has another month to go. So probably won't be picking up a new program of any kind. until that's done. Trying not to overwhelm myself too much. Like they say, only give yourself one habit to work on at a time if you actually want to succeed. I guess if I'm going to try to be a podcast that encourages people and suggests they do something productive or improve something in their lives, I would say, lock away your notebooks. Flip through them, see if there's anything you're missing. See if there's anything you need and just put the others away and keep one. Maybe two if you do morning pages. And if you feel the need to buy one in a moment of weakness, put it with the others. Let it hang out and make friends. Because for me, having all these lying around the house has actually been, yeah. Only buy those really cheap composition books and spiral bound notebooks because I get entirely too precious about pretty notebook. See Christian, that's smart, if you're entirely too precious about it. I have noticed that I put all the bullcrap aside and actually use legal pads. Which probably means I should just go back to legal pads instead of these pretty notebooks. I use the pretty notebooks but as I've said earlier, they get, you know, big mess.

Mur 22:48

Let's see, was there anything else I wanted to go over. On Thursday I'm going to be talking about, I don't know what I'm going to call it. Maybe Poor Little Rich Writer? But every couple of years there seems to be somebody who you hear they got a six figure deal for their books. And

then like two years later, they're in a major newspaper whining that it didn't turn out the way they thought it would. I have thoughts about that. I mean when you talk about something ad nauseum for 16 years. I have this myopic view of, well since I've talked about it over and over again clearly everybody else knows. Even though I know that my audience isn't that big. But just knowing how much information is out there about the publishing industry, for free. You carry this information around with you in your pocket. You literally have the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy in our pockets. And the fact that you can be surprised by something that happens in publishing. So I've got opinions about that and I'm going to go over some of the basics of publishing. I know I talked about the lifespan of a book recently but I'm gonna talk more about the deals, and what to expect as a debut. That's Thursday. The full version of this podcast will be going out to Patreon supporters, and the more edited shorter version that's more concise will be going out to the feed. If you would like to support the podcast, and get the full chatty with the chat kind of experience you need to support the patreon at patreon.com/mightymur, where you will also get- at least for the month of February- daily writing prompts. You can find me at mightymur@gmail.com or miverse.com. If you enjoy this podcast, I also do one called Ditch Diggers with my friend Matt Wallace. It is neither clean, nor talking about craft. We talk about the business of writing and there's lots of swearing. And thank you all. Thank you for those of you in the chat, hanging out. Thank you for all of you lurking for just being here. You're very appreciated, and tomorrow I'll be doing some Stardew Valley gaming at four and if you're here for just I Should Be Writing, I'll be doing that again on Thursday at 1230 Eastern time. So, good luck. Try to cull your notebooks. I know. Me saying this is a bit hypocritical, but I'm going to try too. So, keep at it and wear your mask. And you should be writing.

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