



**January 2021: CURIOUS
Workshop Notes**

*"A curious mind probing for truth may well set your scribbling ass free."
- Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir**

Access all recordings for our monthly Gathering, workshop notes, and downloads at:

<https://heatherdemetrios.com/thewell/gatherings>

*New material will be posted
the Monday following a Gathering

Questions? Feedback? Want to work 1-on-1? :: heatherdemetrios@gmail.com

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Curiouser and Curiouser....

This month, we're looking at how to bring curiosity to our writing practice, process, inner life, and craft/story. Lots of ground to cover!

Notes From The Field

**** Curiosity = Story Gold / Curiosity = Writer Fuel**

When you follow what YOU are curious about, rather than looking at the market or trying to impose a story on yourself, you will discover something that is fresh, intensely yours, addictive, and DELICIOUS. That's a book that's hard to NOT write and one a reader will find difficult to put down.

A good idea is one that turns you on rather than shuts you off. It keeps generating more ideas and they improve on one another. A bad idea closes doors instead of opening them...Scratching is what you do when you can't wait for the thunderbolt to hit you.

- Twyla Tharp

- "Scratching": Blog post on this here: <https://heatherdemetrios.com/blog/scratching>

- *Exquisite Captive*: Prompt in a writing class was "Write about a character who is stuck."
- Brooklyn Coffeehouse Eureka Moment: no new story ideas > typed in first thing I'm curious about in wiki > "Circus" > led to plot download of sweeping multi-generational Russian circus family story I will write someday when I have the brass ovaries to do so

- Current WIPs about things I'm intensely curious about: foreign correspondents (contemporary), reincarnation (fantasy) > helps when doubt, inner critic, etc. comes in
- Curiosity for self-inquiry: Resistance to the meditation cushion > not beating self up but just gently asking why > an invitation to remind myself why this practice is so powerful for me > returned to cushion > already much more grounded

Exploration Break – get out your pen and notebook!

- List three things you're curious about
- Are any of these things appearing in your current WIP?
- If not, how might they make an appearance?
- **Bonus:** After the workshop, list all the things you're curious about for your WIP. (See Twyla Tharp's *The Creative Habit*)

**** We will have time to share these explorations in the Q+A afterwards.**

Masculine vs Feminine

Why is it so hard to give ourselves permission to be curious???

Eve & Pandora : Curiosity as sin > The culture tells us (especially in the West and *especially* in the US) that curiosity is *inefficient, unfocused, a waste of time.*

On Eve: "You might say that if it were not for Eve's transgression, humankind would still be abiding in the uncorrupted Garden of Eden. Or, if you relate to the story as I do, you would say something else. *You would say that Eve looks awake—curious about everything, at home in her body, and in vibrant communion with nature.*" – Elizabeth Lesser, *Cassandra Speaks* (p.29)

On Pandora: "...the goddess Hera gave Pandora the most dangerous gift of all, a "woman's curiosity." (Lesser, 36)

- The culture (predominantly masculine) likes: deadlines, outlines, a plan, a clear product, PROOF. It likes us to hustle for our worth.
- The feminine (intuitive) likes: SPACIOUSNESS, exploration (not necessarily with a specific end in sight, say, the New World), discovery, synchronicity, enchantment, ease, playfulness, POSSIBILITY. With the feminine it's the means, not the ends that our true satisfaction comes from.
- When we focus on a masculine approach ONLY, we miss out on the juicy deliciousness of exploration.
- Note: We need *Integration* of the masculine and feminine so that we can enjoy the process and write the stories of our hearts, but also have the discipline to get them out into the world. ((This is where my You Have A Process course/writer therapy comes in...more on that in later months.))
- Holding space for the process, listening, acting as a vessel or, as Anne Lamott might say, "the designated typist"
- **Field Notes:** When I was a theatre director....and how that applied to my writing process.

Curiosity is concerned with questions, not answers. It loves *why, why, why*. Questions = ENERGY, the more questions, the more energy, the more discovery > the richer your stories are

"Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." – Rilke

Your Relationship To Curiosity: Word Contemplation Practice

- Close your eyes as I lead you through this short contemplation. If you're not working with us live or on the recording, you can also grab a journal and begin engaging in some free association with our word of the month. (I will give you time to jot things down after our contemplation if you're at the Gathering or listening in later).
- Think of the last time, or most memorable moment, when you felt / experienced CURIOSITY. Bring it to mind in as vivid detail as possible.
 - What does curiosity *physically* feel like in the body?
 - What images, memories, sounds, smells, etc. come to mind with this word?
 - What quality of mind does it cultivate within you? Do you feel bright, manic, muddled, whirling, peaceful?
 - Make these feelings and images as vivid and specific as possible.
 - Now, let all those images fade and take a moment to sit with what it feels like to be CURIIOUS.
 - When you're ready, jot down insights, impressions, and questions in your notebook or journal.

** We will have time to share these explorations in the Q+A afterwards.

Practice: Mindfulness For Writers

- Rather than jump into shame, problem-solving, guilt, etc. when encountering fear, the inner critic, failure, overwhelm, etc. we can get curious – this is a much more skillful, workable approach than many of the ones we commonly reach for:
 - **Step One:** Get into the body. What does it feel like, this constriction. Get to know this feeling. It will be your red flag when you are going off the rails, a reminder to invite some gentle, mindful curiosity into the situation.
 - **Step Two:** What information are you gathering? "What's the next right thing?"
- Mindfulness For Writers: "How is my writing / my book / my inner critic / my resistance my teacher?" (see this blog post: "2020 Is Your Teacher": <https://heatherdemetrios.com/blog/2020-is-your-teacher>)
- R.A.I.N Meditation: Getting curious about strong emotion on our challenging writer's journey (see this blog post: "Let it R.A.I.N <https://heatherdemetrios.com/blog/let-it-rain>)

The Writer As Mad Scientist

Some of the most curious people in the world are scientists. I'd argue they are perhaps the *most* curious people. We have much to learn from them.

- A science experiment that goes wrong is seen as important data that ultimately furthers research = they know what doesn't work and they are CURIIOUS about why it didn't work. They "work the problem."

- A writing experiment that goes wrong often results in the writer hating on themselves. They feel frustration, overwhelm, like they're behind. They aren't curious about why something didn't work, they're focused on the next thing they thing will work, and focused on beating themselves up. THEY DON'T WORK THE PROBLEM.

Ways to work the problem:

*** If you have a tarot practice, The Fool and the Page of Wands are your cards for getting CURIOUS! ***

- Journal Explorations
 - How do you get curious as a writer? (Research? Collage? Sidewriting? Etc.)
 - How do you experiment as a writer?
 - Go down the rabbit hole of your story / thing you're curious about - what do you find there?
 - What do you do with what you find?
 - When do you notice yourself feeling panicky and overwhelmed, like the book is taking too much time, that you're wasting time, etc.?
 - "Make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Make. Good. Art." – Neil Gaiman

Story / Craft

- "What If" / The Magic If > My example for *Exquisite Captive*
- First Line Workout Worksheet: [Download on the newsletter perks page](#)
- Profluence: Inviting the reader's curiosity (Great blog post here by author Ingrid Sundberg: <https://ingridsundberg.com/2013/03/06/what-is-profluence/>)
- "Why?" > Plotting through character, "the book is the boss," sidewriting, not imposing outline/story
- The Unlock Your Novel Workbook (on the perks page, as well) – "Keyring of Desire"

Quoted in this month's workshop:

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