

My Writing Life: A Planet in the Milky Way by DM Denton

Why should I feel alone? Is not our planet in the Milky Way?

– Henry David Thoreau: *Walden: Solitude*

Did I escape into my writing or did my writing escape into me? When did words I couldn't speak begin speaking for me? How was the need to be lost and found fulfilled by my own heart? Of all the things I wanted to do, to be, to discover, why did solitude become the most productive, defining and enlightening way for me?

Encarta Webster's Dictionary says *Solitude (is) the state of being alone, separated from other people, whether ... a welcome freedom or ... unhappy loneliness ...*

Freedom? Yes. Loneliness? No. Very often welcome but never unhappy. Not when I find myself surrounded by books and music, cats and comfort, ideas and characters, sleep and wakefulness, and those all important dreams in-between. I choose to step aside from others for more than a while, preferring the company of contemplation and creativity, a place for silent conversations and another kind of reality, a time to exist for my writing unapologetically.

My solitude is not dispiriting like loneliness or isolation. It doesn't insist on separation or confinement like a severe punishment for my dislike of crowds or need for time alone. It doesn't lock me in my room, mind and heart but opens my windows, doors and curiosities to fresh air and destinations and determinations. It's monk-like but not habitual, a fluctuating state of emptying and seeking, an indwelling experience, an affirmation of *being* alone. It sets me apart for the health of my body, the expansion of my mind, the strengthening of my heart, and honoring of my soul.

My solitude isn't utopian. It gives criticism without objectivity and pretends accomplishment without accolades. It doesn't care whether or not anyone knows I'm here, working hard at or putting off my craft. It may even keep me from success, like a too protective father refusing to let any suitors in (for who could be good enough?). I have rebelled, running away to find a society that would love me and support me and pretend I was someone else. It was a lesson in not being able to avoid the unavoidable, a lesson hard to learn until it was everything I knew already.

I returned to a smug sense of "I told you so" but still my solitude was forgiving, encouraging me to be and advising that bygones were bygones. Although not to forget!

A writer must never forget. But take each opportunity to look through starry eyes and wounds to see what the imagination beholds.

My writing life began when I was a child, shy and uncertain and a little lost in the stories that came to me. It continued as I became more adept at speaking like an actor or singer (no wonder I thought I wanted to be either or both) only seeming to hide behind words. It grew more and less important as my *other life* tried to usurp its reign, exiling it until a subject begged its return. It matured, slowly and with further threats to its sovereignty, to become wiser and steadier and better fortified but not necessarily safe from invasion again.