

The Sitting

“More people should ask about work ... I rarely hear anything about the work of sitting down at the desk and writing. The actual, physical process of occupying that space and creating. That’s where the sunshine happens. I wish more writers embraced the act, or at least talked about it openly ... nothing happens without the sitting.”
– essayist Paul Crenshaw

The Physical

After everyone else in my house is at school or work, I go for a walk.

I don’t consciously think of anything on these walks. I just walk. And look at things.

Back at home I make breakfast and a second cup of coffee and take both to my desk. This is key. My desk has a different energy than, say, my kitchen table or my red chair. I write at my desk.

I open the curtain and look at the sugar magnolia tree. Are there blossoms? Buds? If it’s wintertime I avoid looking through its bare branches into the windows of the apartment building across the courtyard.

Then: the sitting. I drink some coffee and unpack my pen. I slouch, but I try not to. I might start with a journal entry or a to-do list. I start writing.

I eat some oatmeal or cereal. I keep writing.

I straighten up my bad posture only to slowly slouch again. I keep writing.

I take a break to use the bathroom or to wander aimlessly around my apartment. I look at myself in the mirror.

I return to my desk. My good posture erodes.

I keep writing.

Clouds move across the sky.

The Work

(But) something is percolating.

I might start with a question – something I can’t quite figure out. Rarely I’ll start with a claim – something I’ve already (started to) figure(d) out.

I play with associations. “Tumbling,” I call it. I might work with the etymology of a word. I might look up the way myth or literature treats my subject.

Away from my desk: thinking. At the mirror: am I still there? I think of Virginia Woolf, her street haunting.

I break into handwriting to veer away from the linearity of type. Arrows point to other thoughts. Ideas are circled.

A thought catches and leads to another and another and another – a brightening.

The Not-Really-Distractions

What’s the weather? Can I wear boots? I hate the half-nudity that summer requires, love the anonymous layers of winter.

Houses, plants, clouds. How do people live? Where are they all going – to what work? Can I wear a shirt like that man’s? Why wear heels?

I wonder where these oats came from, what field, what farm, what country.

In my red chair it’s so easy to get lost in a book, Facebook, FaceTime, online ...

If the buds come too early, and a frost kills them, does that throw the tree off? Does it think it’s had an extra spring, that it’s a year older than it is? How does it feel to be planted instead of mobile? Does this tree know me? Are we neighbors? I don’t want to see my human neighbors, or for them to see me.

What keeps a spine straight? Sontag said she hates her posture. How much do I want to invest in improving mine? I should reread *Against Interpretation*.

I love etymologies. How the whole history of a word is there – hidden in plain sight – if you only know how to look. The ancient Greeks are so foreign to me. Their myths have become so familiar but the way they thought and lived I don’t understand at all.

Let me look up that Woolf quote about mirrors ...

This is how people wrote for centuries. How differently it makes me think than when I tap the letters.

Maybe I should write something about trees or myths or the mirrored gaze or the fluidity of handwriting, of thought, of light or – there it is – sunshine.