

WALKING WORDS

Frustrated with me, my family resorts to name-calling. Begrudgingly, I admit one adjective may fit: rigid. I prefer routine-dedicated. Irked, I validate myself by bonding with two groups of people. Writers who share hysterical family members spouting guilt tripping statements like, “I can’t succumb to my deathbed before 2 PM if I want my writer daughter in attendance.” My second kindred spirits commiserate the challenges in training non-exercising siblings, spouses, and parents about sacred workout times. Explaining my routine behaviour is futile to family members who change habits like sand dunes in perpetual windy seasons.

Cursed or blessed, I prioritize my two passions ahead of family and all other obligations. In balancing the two, I’ve discovered exercise and writing only appear different. They are the same beast and I befriend both every day beginning at 4:30 a.m. in exercise clothes. Wearing workout attire guarantees daily exercise for me. During twenty minutes of yoga, I enter a somnambulistic state indifferent to everything on earth except my current project. Solutions arise for yesterday’s writing difficulties and I take my notepad to breakfast.

After toast, I take ink-captured ideas to my desk often working from 6 through 9. I confess I lack consistent obedience to the twenty-minute break rule but my cell phone timer function reminds me to stretch. (No cell phone? Try your stove timer.) I can sit for hours typing, writing, and researching. Before I exercised regularly, I’d struggle to rise from my desk chair, painfully unbending joints. Seven years of daily stretching keeps me supple. Weight-training 4-5 times a week incorporates upper and lower body strength moves. Upper body strength allows me to sit comfortably in an upright position without slouching. Flexibility exercises pay for their time investment in comfort as they stretch out muscles in my wrists, arms, shoulders, neck and upper back.

If you have a yoga mat or carpet runner, place it over your desk chair. This will remind you to do a few stretches before work. Then position it between you and the bathroom. Do a few stretches each break. After exercise becomes familiar, your mind will easily slip into a creative zone. Back at your desk, become aware if your typing slows or stalls, and learn to allow your mind to wander while you do Tai Chi to alleviate wrist fatigue without even rising from your chair. (Look up some exercises online to help prevent carpal tunnel injuries and various moves that provide keyboarding breaks.)

For a complete body break, at 9:00, I pause most days for a meditative walk to the river. I’m not the first person to employ walking to clear out brain space and invite creative solutions. Falling into a walking rhythm, physical activity and geographical distance combine to facilitate seeing and feeling my abandoned project more clearly. Writer/artist Julia Cameron’s book on walking refers to an altered state of consciousness achievable within 20 minutes. Start slow, aiming for daily 20 minute strolls. Consider that physiological responses to exercise begin almost immediately for seasoned athletes and an average 12 minutes for non-exercisers to experience similar results. Once the meditative/writing/walking becomes a habit, writing solutions and ideas

evolve as quickly as the elite athlete's body reacts to exercise. The line for a troublesome poem just popped into my consciousness one day before I reached the sidewalk. Find your stride in any body movement and once you're moving on automatic pilot, free-flowing thoughts and an exercised body will make your desk so inviting.

After my walk, I transcribe ideas and solutions that materialized out of my body's rhythm. Then it's on the stationary bicycle or treadmill for 30 minutes. GMCC writer-in-residence E. D. Blodgett once advised me to take a tape recorder on the treadmill. When I'm working on tricky dialogue pieces, characters often jabber away in staccato conversations speeding up their dialogue, the faster I walk or run.

My early morning commitment to writing/exercise evolved from setting a schedule and sticking to it. The wee morning hours offer me the only time nobody calls or comes visiting. Daily writing and movement balance and elate me. I feel bad if I miss even one workout. Walking 25 kilometres a week for errands simply invites a different form of creating. I find destination or location irrelevant. Establish the time commitment and when you sit down, you'll write because movement keeps ideas flowing.

Now if someone can teach my family to call in the afternoons, life would be about perfect.

Update: Now having had a cell phone for the last decade or so, it takes real discipline to not look at it for the first two hours of the day or the last hour at night. If you know the importance of a morning routine, you know it is negligible without an evening power-down hour which I still haven't mastered.