

PREFACE

JUST A PAGE

Mired in a soul-crushing stretch at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, one of my favorite people, Brenda, suggested I drop out of school and take up writing as a career. Even though I think she was joking, I considered her suggestion, not seeing a rewarding future resulting from either of my majors - architecture and economics.

While I continued my studies, I never forgot her words, heeding them some twenty years after I “dropped out” of Dubai Women’s College, where I’d been teaching Emirati women... computers and math. Retiring at 44, I moved - with another of my favorite people, a Canadian librarian, Sue, who would become my wife - to a property off a dead-end dirt road on a mountainside near Vilcabamba, Ecuador.

After spending a year deciding how to renovate our new home and then another doing but not quite finishing it, the previous owner of the property, Lee, helped get my writing career started, linking me with his employer, a company catering to expatriates and expat wannabes. Apparently, he liked what he read in my half of the emails we exchanged before and after we purchased his property.

Brenda based her suggestion on the writing of mine she'd read or heard me read as far back as middle school. Then there were the letters I wrote her when people sent letters - stamps, envelopes, and a postal service required. Sitting in my dorm room at the keyboard of Ma's old Smith Corona electric typewriter, I'd tap out whatever came to mind, often with no capitalization or punctuation, to give my fingers a chance to keep up. They seldom could.

Even though my words have always flowed freely, I don't think of myself so much as a writer as a transcriber for the voices inside my head, the hard part making sense of them all. Both blessed and cursed with a memory that rarely forgets, those voices narrate every thread of my life, why what I write, or say, on occasion causes Sue to shake her head, "Where'd that come from?" Why, five years after my writing career began, she encouraged me to stop writing for others and write for myself.

"Give your voices a voice, and they'll quiet down."

I thought it wise to listen to Sue - happy wife, happy life - and started transcribing those voices. Despite the cacophony from the real-life Fisher-Price See 'n Say® The Farmer Says® going on around (and sometimes in) our home, along with life's many distractions, my other projects, my photography, and Sue's constant interruptions, I've written more since her suggestion than I ever have.

Even when I was in sixth grade and my English teacher, Mrs. Winkler, with silver-colored glasses matching the hair bee-hived high upon her head, assigned students writing seemingly every day. "Just a page," she'd say, "Just a page." That page was a sheet in the ubiquitous spiral-bound notebooks where students wrote down important things their teachers said. Given

Mrs. Winkler's mandate, some students sought wide-ruled notebooks, so a page required fewer words to fill than one in the narrower college-ruled notebooks. Others just wrote with airy letters. Some did both.

For many of my classmates, just a page was a challenge, "Who can write that much?" I could, with ease. For me, Mrs. Winkler's assignments were a challenge of a different sort - to fill no more than just a page, I so full of... words. As Sue once said, "You have a gift for taking a story about nothing and filling a page."

Until this book, my audience has been limited to family and friends, and no longer strangers on social media who've become my unintentional Alpha and Beta readers. Then there are the English teachers, writers, editors, publishers, and Grammar Nazis among those who've contributed, in a more technical way, to make my writing better. To a point, because with readers telling me I write the same way I speak, I don't want to lose my not-always-grammatically correct voice.

While there's a lot not to "Like" about social media, it's given me a platform to write "just a page" more days than not. My "scheduled" posts also provide me with "deadlines" I don't have but need, I often doing my best work when I must. Without them and the resulting stories, I'd be one of those people forever writing but never finishing a book.

This book, the first in a series, contains stories I've been collecting since I can remember, stories I started transcribing in Mrs. Winkler's sixth grade English class, her assignments encouraging me to think about writing one page at a time. A valuable lesson learned because as a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step, writing a book begins with just a page. So, too, does reading a book, it now your turn...