

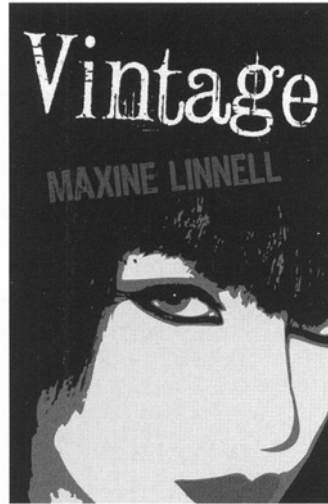
Releasing creativity

Maxine Linnell

The launch date is set. The book cover image has been finalised, the blurb on the back has been decided, and the last proofs have been read. It's too late to give up now. I have to go through with it. Vintage will come out in May.

I've known I wanted to write all my life. Or maybe there's been the 'writer' in me who's surfaced every now and again to see if the conditions are favourable. But I can see a strong part of my own journey has been in living with the writer, but not living as her. I silenced her, was afraid of her, doubted her. Did she really have anything to say? It's not been comfortable, or easy. Maybe some of what I've discovered might be useful to others, I don't know. I've met so many people along the way who aren't living what they know they need to live. So I know I'm not alone.

The form of it has been 'becoming a writer' for me. But it could have been artist, or sculptor, or any number of other ways of being. For me, words have been the medium, and it's been about writing the words and having them read - and that means publishing. It might have been enough just to write them, and sometimes it has been, but the core feel is for writing and publishing and being read. Writing in my other professions, as a therapist and S&S editor, didn't do it. The skill was there,



but the form didn't meet the need, a need which I still don't completely understand. Perhaps I can't understand that until the process is complete, or further along.

I could psychologise, pathologise, analyse myself for wanting to be published, but that's not the focus of this article. How was it done, after a lifetime of prevaricating, procrastinating and burying the writer at the

bottom of a very large pile of other aspects of myself?

I can pick out three main areas where I have found the resources to go ahead and get to this point, and I'll call them support, structure and a source of urgency – a reason not to wait any longer.

Many writers who succeed have someone who totally believes in them, looks after them and generally holds them. It's like a parent being with a child creating his/her world, clapping at every brick going on the tower, every step taken. I wasn't in that position, as a child or as an adult. Sebastian Faulkes, Virginia Woolf, Voltaire, Browning, Gertude Stein – there's someone in the background. If you have that someone, that's great. But not all of us do, and I think attachment issues may lie at the back of a problem with sitting alone for long periods doing something where the pay-off is uncertain and long-term.

So I built that support. I did an MA in Creative Writing, where the commitment helped me hold my intention and take my work seriously. I also joined a writers' group, where my 'writer' was the part of me that has a place. There I am among others who struggle with the same dilemmas and confidence lapses – and get on with it. I met people who've succeeded – who have got where I wanted to get, and more. I learn from them, and they offer their support, praise and feedback. I've been knocked by the feedback sometimes – and have reminded myself that the writing is not 'me'. I can

learn, change, grow as a writer. I go almost every week for my writing 'fix', and I slowly inched my way closer to the goal. I also discovered that I could write in a public place – that 'writing' did not have to equate with 'being alone'. I sit in the gym bar, facing a picture window, and work away for as long as nobody sits so close that I'm distracted by the conversation. I go to the library and scribble. And then when I write at home, it's not like a life sentence of aloneness.

Rigid structure is not something that suits me. I don't have a regular rhythm to my day. I thrive on change and difference, get bored easily. So I had to find a structure to the writing that gave me space to be, left room for friends and family, and didn't send me into my own created world so far that I'd struggle to get back. I still haven't got that quite right. I'm very good at delaying and finding things to do. When I'm starting a story, I tend to take off for a few days and go to a place where I'm alone every morning to write, then see people or go out for the rest of the day. Fantasy and reality co-exist, and the diving in to the other world, to the characters who are growing in my awareness, is safely protected by some boundaries.

The sense of urgency was harder, and came without a conscious intention. The space cleared. The 'writer' was always in the wings waiting for other things to stop – and, of course, they didn't stop. So when my body stopped with fibromyalgia in 2001, stopped almost to the point of thinking it would never function again, that could have been the end of it all.

But a sense of life persisted, and the sense that there was something important to do, something un-lived, brought me back to life with that knowledge that it was time to stop waiting – that I had to do it now.

Deadlines, set by others and my own, hold me into the writing and that sense of urgency. Once I had an agent (after many rejections), I could 'use' her to help me keep at it – tell her I'd let her have a draft by a certain date and then stick to it. And now there's a launch date and a publisher, that adds to the sense of being supported and having structure. The wobble when the last edit of the proofs went into the post-box was steadied by my

agent saying the book was 'awesome'. She 'mothered' the frightened child. The part of me who doubts my own ability, who wants to hide at the thought of being out there in the world as 'myself', rather than as a psychotherapist or teacher, is soothed by knowing others who struggle – and who get through it. The extravert can have a life too.

Vintage comes out in May, and I hope it's the first of several novels. It deals with adolescence, with freedom, choice and identity. It covers life as a teenager in 1962 and now. Fame and money are unlikely, but if one or two people read it and are affected, that will be the most precious gift.

Further reading

Perry, Ruth, and Brownley, Martine Watson, eds. *Mothering the Mind*. Holmes and Meier, 1984.

Maxine Linnell is a writer and psychotherapist, living in Leicester. She was editor of S&S from 1998-2008. To find out more about her therapy practice, go to www.maxinelinnell.co.uk. To find out about her writing, go to www.maxinelinnell.info. She will be presenting her thoughts on creativity at the AHPB festival.

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