



By Julie Mariouw

I can hardly remember what it was like before they came. I just know that one day they showed up during a workshop I was teaching. It wasn't a thunderous arrival. They were very quiet. They tiptoed in without me noticing. The change in atmosphere came first. I think my workshop members noticed it: the slightly different turn of my head, the adjustment of a knee. I wish I had filmed the workshop so I could have seen it. As it is, I didn't notice the muses until after the workshop ended.

It was when I was writing with a friend. We met at a coffee house, with our notebooks and pens in hand. I felt it the minute my words hit the page. Somehow my writing had become three-dimensional, when before it had been only two-dimensional. My friend noticed it too, I'm sure. For after I read my work out loud we both sat in stunned silence.

It was the feeling that something had landed in the world, something that hadn't been there before. As if a door had opened and a new being had walked through. You could almost feel the breeze as the door opened and shut.

I felt exhilaration and freedom and a sense of moving forward. And right after that I felt terror that they might go away. For I think there was more than one muse. In fact I know there was. They were on a mission from the universe, with something very specific in mind.

I knew I had no control over them, that they had been given to me. I also knew that it was my duty to write with them every day, or they would very shortly leave.

They began to show up more frequently. They learned to trust me. They needed me to be present or they could not make their magic. That and they needed me to write down what they said. This I have done for the last two years, and we have gotten close. Every day, when I sit down to write, I swear I feel them nodding behind me.

You could say these muses are dimensions of my personality, but I'm convinced they're much more than that. For I have a sense that they were present in my childhood, given to me through magic, and then went away because I was not paying attention. Somehow, through writing daily I allowed a door to open, and they slipped through, sighing with relief at finally being reunited.

But then these muses have personalities of their own. They seem to be separate beings who are outside of my sphere. As if they belong to some universal society in which muses of all types wait until they are needed on the earth. You could say they are characters. But are they? What is the difference between a muse and a character? It feels to me they are guiding me, that that is their sole reason for being in this world. And, yes, they do make it onto the page. But they are more than the characters on the page. They are the magic behind the characters.

What do the muses look like? Well, that is hard to say. Sometimes they seem like angels. At other times they are like dark clouds. Still other times they are absolutely invisible, and the only thing I can feel is a hand pressing on my shoulder, or the warmth of their breath on my neck.

I'm pretty sure they're going to leave me when they're done. I hate to think about that, but it seems inevitable. Their sole purpose is to heal me, and they have accomplished about half of what they came to do. I can't imagine what I will be like without them.

But, for all I know, the universe will assign new muses after the old ones leave. I like to think that will be the case. But even if I don't get any more, I have learned so much. I have learned that I live in a magical universe, and not to think I know everything, because I can never be sure who will show up next.



Bio:

Julie Mariouw is a published author, trained Amherst Writers & Artist workshop leader, and owner of Wellspring Writing Workshops LLC, through which she offers creative writing workshops in the Ann Arbor area (and now also online). Julie helps people bypass their internal critics, go directly to feelings & memories, and tap into the healing power of writing. Julie is fascinated by the role of the physical body in writing and creates prompts to help connect writers with this dimension of themselves.

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