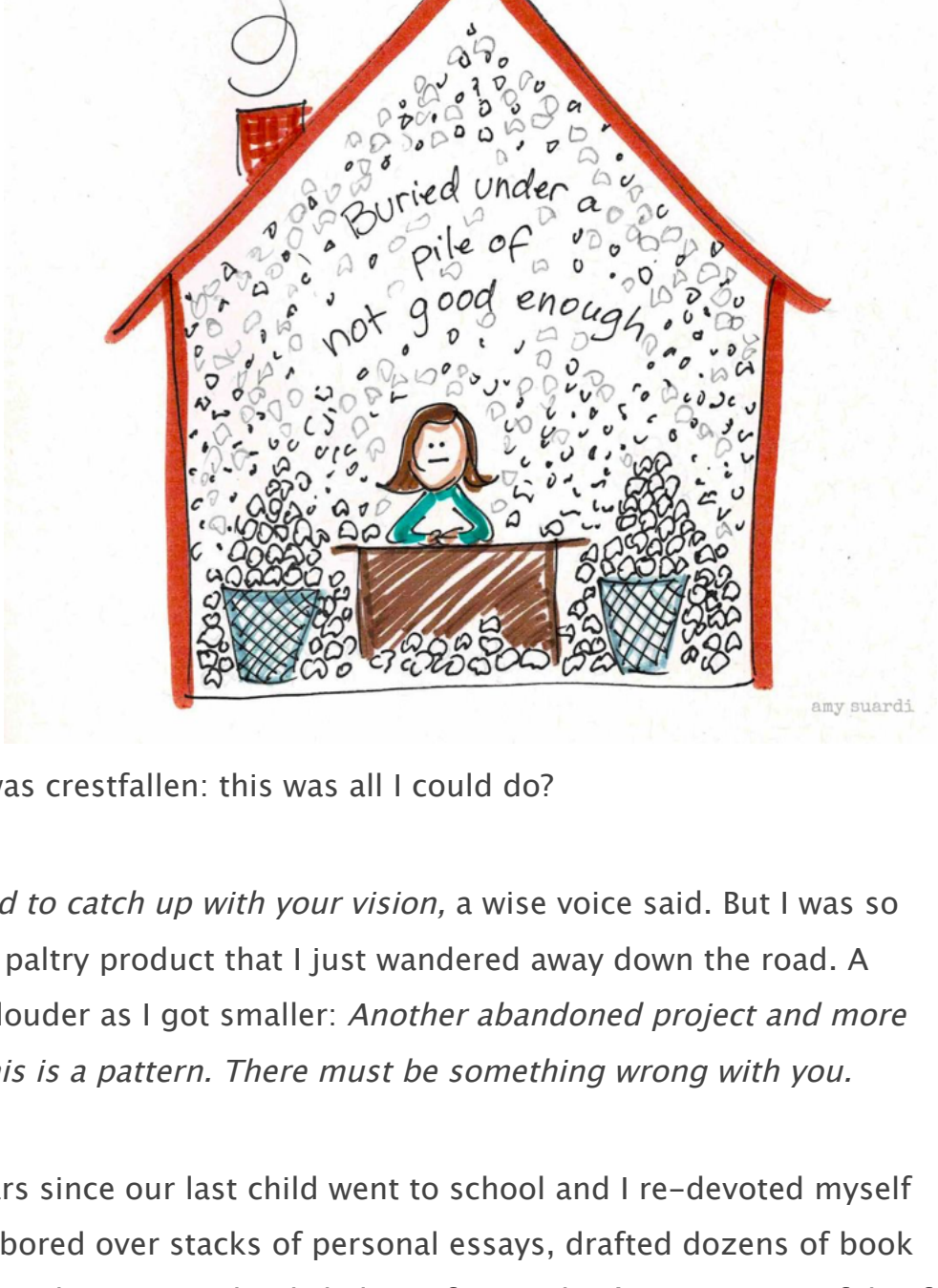


## Buried Under a Pile of Not Good Enough

November 28, 2023 § 21 Comments

By AMY SUARDI

Whenever I hear an author advise, *Finish what you start*, I slink backward. I just spent 4 years writing a memoir that I eventually abandoned. Then I started a micro-memoir collection, thinking short form was better for me. But when it was time to review what I had written to write an introduction, I was crestfallen: this was all I could do?



Your skills just need to catch up with your vision, a wise voice said. But I was so discouraged by my paltry product that I just wandered away down the road. A different voice got louder as I got smaller: *Another abandoned project and more months wasted? This is a pattern. There must be something wrong with you.*

Over the past 6 years since our last child went to school and I re-devoted myself to writing, I have labored over stacks of personal essays, drafted dozens of book chapters, and crammed notes into bookshelves of journals. I've written armfuls of craft articles, pages of prose poems, and folders of micro-memoirs. But only a handful have I finished and sent out into the world.

I revise and revise and revise, but they never seem quite right. It might take me months to get an essay 85% done, and then after the last round of critiques, I drop it. Or I send an essay to a couple of places and they reject it and then I can never face it again. I feel like I'm living in a house filled with crumpled paper balls.

People tell me: write for fun, write for yourself! Relax, enjoy! Writing is my preferred mode of self-expression. I love it, and I do it for myself, but I also do it for others.

Prolific author Heather Sellers once said, "I see writing as a service industry." In the partnership between writer and reader, the writer seeks to translate what's inside so that the reader can see and feel what the author sees and feels. To me, at heart, writing is a way to communicate.

The one period when I lost my self-consciousness about sharing my work was during the pandemic. I wrote every day and shared my thoughts about "my beautiful terrible pandemic life" on a blog which then turned into a self-published book. But since then, as before, I have been unable recapture that urgency and fearlessness.

The glut of half- or almost-done essays clogging the arcane alleyways of my computer makes me think that somewhere inside me, I actually don't want to get published.

If the word "submit" already had a dark connotation for me — exposing one's soft un-shelled body to the swords and whims of those in power — the word "share" has also become fraught.

"Sharing" one's writing is not like passing around a bag of M&Ms. In a world inundated with words, news, blogs, journals, magazines, books, websites — content! — sharing no longer feels like giving. It feels more like begging.

I've tried everything to relax and be my full daring creative self. I've imagined my ideal reader. I've sent chapters by snail mail to friends. I've meditated and done reiki before writing. I've hired coaches, taken workshops, and read books about creativity. I've tried writing apps that block distractions and play soothing music, I've tried writing everything by hand. I've tried writing on a typewriter, in a closet, with a friend. Nothing works.

Maybe it's in the act of thinking about the other that I get all tangled up. People have passed on to me Stephen King's advice: "Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open." But what if you can already feel the cold draft sneaking over the threshold?

When I look back on my writing life, I can see how much progress I've made. I can now write alone in the house without pacing and eating cookies. I can sit down first thing in the morning without procrastinating. I can start my own projects without being assigned homework. I can apply new forms and techniques. I can even support others in their creative pursuits.

I'm mystified and embarrassed by my failure to launch. Am I crippled by a debilitating perfectionism? Am I irrationally terrified of being rejected? Does part of me feel unsafe and secretly set up roadblocks?

Friends and coaches have suggested I consider my "why." Why do I write, and why do I want to be published? My answer is usually: I want to document my life, I want to make something beautiful, I want to touch people.

But maybe there is something more pressing. Maybe I want to be loved. Maybe I want to be told that I'm good. Maybe I want to matter.

When talking about creativity, I tell people how I aspire to be a tree. Trees create thousands upon thousands of seeds every year, and only a tiny portion will find the right conditions to sprout, and an even tinier proportion will grow into little trees.

But, as far as we know, a tree doesn't analyze how well it's doing, if other trees are producing more, if last year's crop was better, if its leaves are shapely. Humankind's greatest power may be our ability to self-reflect, but it may also be our greatest burden.

I wonder, how can I be strong and tall and steady like a tree?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Amy Suardi** is a writer of personal essay, poetry, and memoir. She supports others in their artistic endeavors, working one-on-one with people in all creative fields as a creativity coach. She also facilitates writing workshops, circles, and retreats. Her writing has appeared in *River Teeth*, *Motherwords*, *Start it Up*, and *Rabble*, and she is the founder of the **Frugal Mama** blog.

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Tagged: **pandemic writing, the gap, why do we write?**

## § 21 Responses to *Buried Under a Pile of Not Good Enough*

**Karen DeBonis**  
November 28, 2023 at 7:55 am

Amy, I hear your dilemma. Maybe you're not ready to be a tree. This engaging essay seems to come from the perspective of the seed, not knowing if it will root or fall on infertile soil. Maybe you need to keep writing from that place. We've all been there and can relate.

**Reply**

**c37006983**  
November 28, 2023 at 9:00 am

Hi Karen, I love imagining myself as a seed. Thank you for this sweet insight and your encouragement. Amy

**Reply**

**Heather O'Shea**  
November 28, 2023 at 8:19 am

Thank you for sharing this beautiful piece! It doesn't sound to me as though you have failed to launch; more that you've been busy building a sound boat that will take you wherever you decide to go.

I have been carrying around this quote from Rilke since my twenties (turning 60 soon). He's talking about poems, but I think it applies... "Ah, poems amount to so little when you write them too early in your life. You ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness for a whole lifetime, and a long one if possible, and then, at the very end, you might perhaps be able to write ten good lines." I find it comforting.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:44 am

Dear Heather, I also find that saying by Rilke comforting! I've never heard it before, but it's heartening to hear a famous writer say to wait, to live, to not expect to be great until the end. And only a few lines at that. Thank you, Amy

**Reply**

**Ryder S. Wyatt**  
November 28, 2023 at 8:31 am

I can so relate to this. Some of us are not cut out to publish as much as others, and I have come to terms ( sort of ) with this. Writing is an act of art, so do your art. Most of us are tortured artists, I have mostly come to terms with this, too!

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:46 am

Hi Ryder, I've been toying with that same thought too — maybe I'm just not going to be one of those writers who publishes much. And the fact that many artists are tortured also makes me feel more normal. Thank you, Amy

**Reply**

**Lainy Carlaw**  
November 28, 2023 at 9:12 am

This really resonated with me:) I've been so close for so long but unable to break through and I try to remember to do it for the love of the work but it's also so frustrating. The paragraph about sharing your writing like M&M's was spot on. This piece will definitely stay with me. Thank you so much for sharing this vulnerable, beautiful, impossible, possible writing journey with us. You are definitely not alone! ❤️

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:48 am

Dear Lainy, I agree — it's hard to just do it for the love of the work. I feel like I'm not completing the circle. And yes — it does feel like a beautiful impossible possible writing journey! Good to know you're there with me, Amy

**Reply**

**mesomari**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:25 am

Amy, you are not alone. We are the few of many alike in this way: forests of material with no one to harvest it and bring it to market. But ah, the quietude and peace of the forest—it speaks to our spirits, feeds our souls. There is bliss in this.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:50 am

Dear Mesomari, You paint such poetic images of the unharvested forests and the clamoring markets! And yes, you are so right about the incredible peace to be found in the forest. Thank you, Amy

**Reply**

**Marie A Bailey**  
November 28, 2023 at 5:01 pm

Amy, what a wonderful, honest essay. I feel like you're describing me. I have so many unfinished novels, stories, essays, and poems. Here I am, finally retired, and with all the time I ever desired to work on my writing. And yet I struggle. I make deals with myself that if I only finish this one novel, I don't need to do anything else. Some of it is my own perfectionism, knowing that I'll never be as satisfied with my writing as I want to be, and some is the fear of rejection. Of course, my writing will be rejected, but it will never be accepted if I don't put it out there. And yet. Sometimes I wonder if I will spend my remaining years struggling to get my words out there. I wonder, but I haven't stopped yet.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 28, 2023 at 10:15 pm

Hi Marie, I identify with so much of what you say! I too wonder if I had more time, would it change anything? The perfectionism and rejection if I had more time might still be there. But you're right: rejection is necessary in order to be accepted. I wish it weren't true! Thank you for sharing your world, Amy

**Reply**

**daviddobson672**  
November 29, 2023 at 5:18 am

Plant your idea seeds in a pot and be patient and let Nature nurture them. One of them will grow into your fine strong tree. Simples @right?

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 29, 2023 at 8:58 am

Dear David, Yes, nature also teaches us the virtue of patience, doesn't it? I love your metaphor and hope to embody it. Thank you, Amy

**Reply**

**BJ**  
November 29, 2023 at 9:23 am

This is soooooo relatable. I'm working on a lovely essay! Thank you for sharing it.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 29, 2023 at 2:22 pm

Thank you, BJ. That's an interesting question you pose: will we ever feel enough? And how can we write into that space?

**Reply**

**BJ**  
November 29, 2023 at 7:49 pm

I don't imagine ever feeling enough, though it does give me/us stuff to write about.

**Reply**

**daviddobson672**  
November 30, 2023 at 1:03 am

Hi Amy and BJ, I wonder how many writers and artists ever have or had the self-confidence to "feel enough?" Consider how many writers were not published, not "discovered" until after their death. Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson spring to mind, but there are countless others. What kept them going? It's like having faith in anything, be it God or whatever: self-doubt is part of the process and makes us stronger, and as you say, gives us stuff to write about. Those are my thoughts, and even as I write them I'm starting to doubt them. Being human is so frustrating sometimes. Mynd yn dda, David.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
November 30, 2023 at 9:30 am

Hi David, You made me laugh at the end when you said you were starting to doubt your own words as you said them. It is hard to be a human! And you're so right about many artists being tortured by self-doubt. I guess the quandary could also be posed as: how can I be a writer and be happy? Amy

**Reply**

**daviddobson672**  
November 30, 2023 at 1:00 pm

Hi again Amy, I'm happy when I create a world or a situation and I put some people in it and those people make me laugh or cry. Never mind what editors think about its commercial viability. A famous writer once told me to learn a trade, earn a living, then write and be happy doing it because you're not dependent on it to pay the bills. John Updike was one of the best and most prolific American writers of the 20th Century, and he wrote because he was driven to do so and because he loved what he was doing. He really didn't care about getting published. I guess he loved what he was happy.

**Reply**

**Amy Suardi**  
December 1, 2023 at 5:02 pm

Lots of food for thought for me as I take a pause on writing for publication. Thank you!

Leave a Reply