



Interview: Laura Munson, Author of the Memoir ‘This is Not the Story You Think It Is’

Posted by: [Suzanne Brazil](#) March 16, 2015 in [Book Interviews](#), [Books](#), [Non-Fiction](#)



Laura Munson is the *New York Times* and international best-selling author of [This Is Not The Story You Think It Is](#) (Putnam 2010) and founder of the acclaimed [Haven Writing Retreat](#). Her essay in the *New York Times* Modern Love Column was recently listed as #2 on The Ten Best [Modern Love](#) Columns Ever list (*New York Times*, December 19, 2014). Her work has also appeared in the *New York Times*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *O. Magazine*, *The Week*, *Huffington Post*, *Redbook*, *Woman’s Day*, *Good Housekeeping* and *More Magazine*.

Can you tell us a little bit about how you got started writing?

I have written since I was little. I was that kid with the flashlight under her covers or up in her treehouse, writing in a journal. I have boxes of journals that go back to 4th grade. That said, the things that come most naturally to us are often the things we ignore, so I put all my passion into theater and film in school until I took

a screenplay elective and realized that I was a writer. I started writing screenplays, switched quickly to fiction and memoir, and have been writing ever since with all my heart. It's an obsession, really.

What can you share about your current project?

I am working on several projects at the moment — a novel, a memoir, and a book about living a healthy, balanced writing life. I also blog regularly for my [Haven blog](#) and the [Huffington Post](#), and write personal essays for print and online magazines. I'm all about process, and I try to always have something in the creation process, something in the submissions process, and hopefully...something in the publishing process.

Is there a theme or common thread that runs through your previous books? If so, is that intentional?

I like to write about the stuff people do to each other and how we grow from it — good, bad and ugly. I'm fascinated by the facets of the human heart and how we survive this beautiful and heartbreaking thing called Life. I also like to weave the subject of Home into my writing, both in the world and in ourselves. And usually, since I live in [Montana](#), there is an element of wilderness that finds its way into my stories, real or imagined — the wilderness of nature and of the Human Condition. I'm not sure if it's intentional, but it's what comes out naturally, and I believe that when we tap into our natural flow, we are writing in communion with our best selves.

Do you derive creative satisfaction from other writing assignments that you may have for commercial purposes, i.e. magazine articles, essays, etc.? Is it the same as working on a memoir or novel? If not, how does it differ?

I only write what feels real and authentic to me, so whenever I have a writing "job" it's always a perfect example of that quote: "If you love what you do, you never work a day in your life." I'm lucky that way. For a long, long time I didn't get paid for my writing, and I didn't let it stop me. We must cultivate a hunger for our voice and once we do, the pay-off is immense. When we know our white-hot subjects, we attract writing projects/assignments which grow organically from what we have already put out there with past writing, so one honest, congruent piece begets another. At my Haven Writing Retreats, I work hard with people to find the subjects that are charged for them, and once they put their finger on the pulse of those themes and give themselves permission to write their way into them...that's when things start cranking for people. And there's A LOT of satisfaction in that!

Who are your first readers — or do you share only with your agent/editor?

I have a strict protocol that I use for my early readers. The short version is: only give your stuff to people who really want to read it, who are relentless about asking you, have zero agenda, share your taste in books and writing in general, and will be honest. And set up a contract that works for you both to avoid awkward run-ins at the grocery store! That said, I love my agent and I trust her opinion with all my heart. Agents are very busy, and it's in many ways a thankless job, so I only send it to her once I am SURE it is as good as I can get it and that usually means it's been read by at least three people, and that I'm well into my third or fourth draft. The attitude that "an editor will fix all my issues" isn't a good one to adopt. It's the writer's job to deliver as clean and alive a piece as possible and that takes work and time and a wide-open third eye.

Describe the difference in the feeling or emotion you receive from writing (the work) vs. publishing (the outcome).

The work: I love the journey. If you don't love the journey, find something else that you love because it's all about the journey. Delight in it, even and especially when it's hard. Embrace the hardship! Breathe into the groundlessness of it. Understand that all writing has an inherent problem and become the exact sleuth that will find the solution!

The published work: It's between the published work and the reader at that point. It's nice to be paid. And it's nice to have readers. Sometimes REALLY nice. But once your work is out there, it's really none of your business anymore. It's time to get back to the next writing journey!

One tip you think aspiring writers should consider ignoring?

Anything that starts with: "10 easy steps..." Or asks you to follow a method, a guru, or pay out a lot of money. All you need is a piece of paper and a pen and the guts to put your heart in your hand and translate thought into the form of heart *language*. Sounds easy, huh. It ain't. I wish someone had told me this a long time ago: You don't have to do it alone! Find a writing community. Go on a Haven Retreat!

Where do you write? Special pen? Favorite chair? Beverage while writing, etc.?

I like to say that I've raised flexible children and a flexible muse. I've written on everything from cocktail napkins to fancy Italian leather-bound journals, from my laptop to my Mother-ship computer...in trains, planes, automobiles...you name it. Lots of green tea with jasmine when writing. Sometimes wine while editing. Endless water. The muse really likes water, especially Montana well water.

Most unexpected experience bringing your first book to publication?

That would take a few hours. Suffice it to say that pretty much everything that has happened to me on the road of publication is totally outside of anything I ever read in any book about the publishing process. SO that's good news. Know why you write, write, put it out there, and go back to writing. At a certain point, it's a numbers game and all bets are off. The only thing you can control is doing the work and submitting it.

Favorite book or author growing up?

Growing up, I loved anything with horses or nature in it. Now throw in a few derelicts on a hero's journey who like good food, and I'm good to go. Which means, I really love [Jim Harrison's](#) work.

Last "great" book you read?

[When Women Were Birds](#) by Terry Tempest Williams. She reminds me of the life that exists between the lines of prose. You have to learn how to read those too... Correction: you GET to learn how to read those too. When you're really doing the work, it's all one big beautiful journey, even the hardship. Especially the hardship.

You can find out more about Laura and Haven Writing Retreats by visiting her at www.lauramunson.com.

Tagged with: [#amwriting](#) [author interview](#) [Huffington Post](#) [Laura Munson](#) [Memoir](#) [Modern Love Column](#) [Montana](#) [motherhood](#) [nature](#) [novels](#) [personal essay](#) [writing retreats](#)

About Suzanne Brazil



Suzanne M. Brazil is a freelance writer and editor living in a recently empty nest in the suburbs of Chicago. Her work has been featured in Chicken Soup for the Soul, Writer's Digest, The Daily Herald and many local publications. She is a frequent blog contributor and is working on the second draft of her first novel.