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[Writing is Just a Day at the Beach](#)

August 23, 2015 | By [Suzanne Brazil](#) | [6 Replies](#) [More](#)



If you combined all five Great Lakes and poured them over the U.S., we'd be under 9.5 feet of water. I live less than 10 miles from Lake Michigan, the third largest lake, and almost never visit. I usually walk on familiar paths with predictable landscaping close to my neighborhood. Similar to my walking routine, I usually write at the same desk or in the same chain coffee shop.

Most weeks, I waver between four committed exercise sessions and four unplanned fast food drive-bys. I extend this "rule of four" to the number of writing sessions I squeeze in around my full-time job and family commitments (and my latest Netflix addiction—The Office). Recently, I said "no" to a last-minute family activity and yes to protecting my planned writing time. But first, I needed to walk.

I want a creative boost so I opt for a change of scenery and head east, landing on the rocky shores of Lake Michigan. Ever cautious, I text my location to my husband with the tag line "in case I get kidnapped." Potential dangers lurk in this foreign frontier. Like learning the revision process on my first novel, attempting something new is scary.

In the parking lot, two bearded men eye me as I exit my car. I hesitate leaving my vehicle unguarded but decide I've come too far (8.7 miles) to turn back. The blue-on-blue horizon where water meets sky beckons at the end of a dirt path. On the way, I skirt around a suspicious, white-haired man in a black puffy jacket.

The 35mm camera slung around his neck strikes me as a possible decoy he might use to lure aspiring models. Seventy pages into the second draft of my WIP, I fear I'm doing it all wrong. I write without knowing if my characters ring true or if my plot is plausible. Sometimes I avoid tackling tough scenes and write easy cliches because I fear the result of digging deeper. Still I don't give up.

The breeze kicks in as the path descends toward the shore. The wind comes in undulating waves carrying the sound of the breaking water. Sporadic clumps of people dot the sand. At this distance, I have to guess which faint tracks to follow in order to join them. There is no definitive sign pointing the way. Trying to complete my first novel feels like stumbling blindfolded on an unmarked trail. Dozens of books on craft offer glimmers but no guarantees. I have to figure it out myself. One foot in front of the other, one page at a time.

Facing south, the terraced beach steps down, layered with slabs of rock to prevent erosion. I must negotiate the uneven terrain to cover any distance on foot. I long to go beyond, to see more, but the farther I venture, the less populated the beach and the more vulnerable I feel. Many have gone before me but claiming the identity of writer and believing my words worth reading takes more courage than I thought. I face the water, an expanse more ocean-like than lake, close my eyes and breathe deep of the sharp, fishy air. I turn my neon walking shoes and push farther along the ribbon of sand.

Almost an hour later, I scramble down the staircase of boulders to the fourth terrace and stand alone, toeing the smooth rocks in the packed sand at the water's edge. Three tattooed teenagers in black t-shirts saunter past and glance my way, nodding a quick "hey," before moving along. I'm relieved they don't harass me then chastise myself for ever thinking they might. I do the same with each new writing challenge, piling on self-recrimination when I procrastinate and recording productive hours lost to my literary inferiority complex. When I silence my doubts and squash my fears, when I make myself "just write, you big baby," I find I'm capable of more than I thought.

On the positive side, I feel accomplished for shaking things up, seeking a different destination, exploring outside my comfort zone. About eight years ago, I slipped on the ice and shattered my ankle. It's held together with pins and a metal plate. Understandably, I am cautious on unfamiliar turf. Sometimes, though, I have to remind myself that I'm not an invalid. Neither am I a perfect or fully formed writer. I often feel inadequate in a group of published authors or a passel of prestigious MFA graduates. Who do I think I am to mingle in this rarefied air? I have to remind myself that I am doing it—this writing thing. I have desire and determination. I can always learn. I can always improve. I am learning. I am improving.

The fourth terrace is my limit today. The sun warms my cheeks, the wind pushes the waves, and the spray refreshes. The rushing sound of the water breaking creates a hypnotic rhythm. I raise my hand to shade my eyes and gaze down the lakefront, intimidated at how much farther I have to travel.

When comparison sprouts feelings of inadequacy, when inexperience challenges my mastery of craft, I remind myself that in writing, as in life, the good stuff comes from attempting what I've never done before. I will no longer be the woman who dreamed of someday writing a book. My reward for pressing on in spite of my limited experience and my fears is the glance back at how far I have come, and having the beach to myself.

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.

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- 1. [What's Happening?! | Suzanne M. Brazil](#) | August 26, 2015



1. [Denise Barnes](#) says:
[September 13, 2015 at 5:59 am](#)

I enjoyed the post, Suzanne. I remember thinking exactly the same thing when I started writing my first novel, a historical saga called Annie's Story. Who did I think I was, fantasising I could write a book? I wasn't clever enough. Never mind that I had a degree and had written and had had published a couple of memoirs. It was the fiction side of writing that awed me. I loved doing short stories, but a novel... Annie's Story was published in April. Juliet's Story will be out in January, and Kitty's Story, the third of The Voyagers trilogy, should be out at the end of next year. I'm now on my fourth novel, a romantic comedy for a change. And the doubts are back. Is it funny enough? Yes, I've written 3 novels but is that all I really have in me? Shouldn't I stop when I'm winning? But I won't. I'm a writer and I love it more than anything. And just to let you know, I probably did 25 drafts before I was satisfied with Annie, and the same number with Juliet. So enjoy the journey! 😊

Reply



2. [Barbara Gabriel](#) says:
[September 7, 2015 at 11:25 am](#)

I love the uncertainty of trying out a new activity, walking a new path, adjoined with the challenges of writing. Nice job.

Reply



- o [Suzanne Brazil](#) says:
[September 8, 2015 at 12:37 pm](#)

Thanks for reading, Barbara. My goal this year is to kick fear in the behind!

Reply



3. [Linda Sienkiewicz](#) says:
[August 24, 2015 at 1:33 pm](#)

Good for you. Determination is the best tool a writer can have. (waving at you from the other side of the Mitten!)

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- o [Suzanne M. Brazil](#) says:
[August 24, 2015 at 3:26 pm](#)

The mitten! Love it. My daughter is an NMU grad and we love the whole mitten 😊 Thank you for taking the time to read. I'm always trying to sharpen that particular tool.

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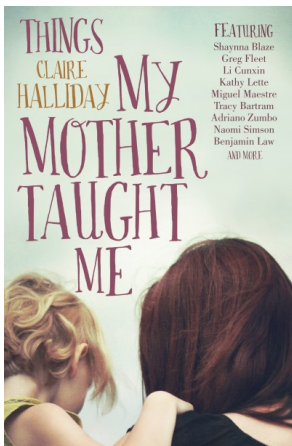
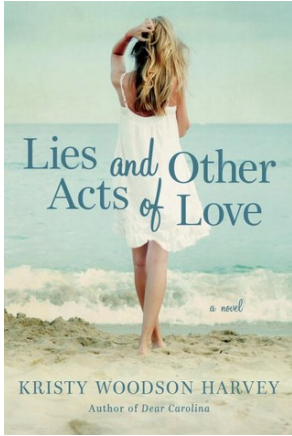
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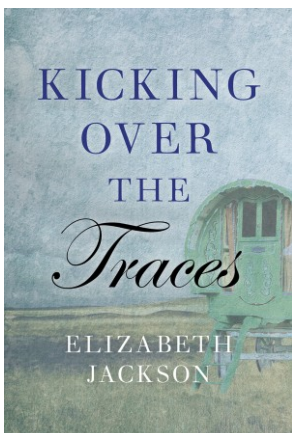
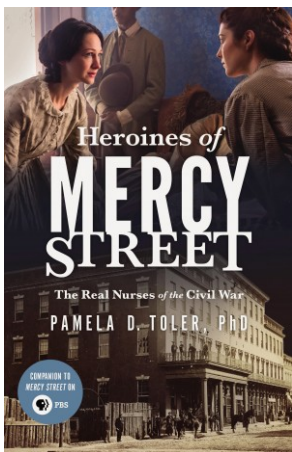
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