

Why do I write?

Leah Chillery

I write to keep me sane. I was a quiet child but as they say, 'Still waters run deep'. My inner chatterbox had a lot to say, and fancied itself to be quite the philosopher. From a very early age, I was contemplating the meaning of life and death. Based on conversations that I have had with others, it seems such serious subject matter is not a common thing for a young child.

I recall at about six or so... sat looking at my own little hand in awe of the fact that I was ME and that YOU are YOU, and that I would never be YOU, and YOU would never be ME! But the rabbit hole went deep, I mean... who is ME anyway? And if I am the ME speaking these thoughts, then how am I also the ME hearing these thoughts? As an introvert, I didn't really feel comfortable sharing these crazy ponderings with anyone else. So I began writing my mind-bending musings down in the form of poetry. At college, I read some of these poems to my roommate and she said the collection should be called MORBID MOUTH. To be fair, they were quite dark and bleak, but as a kid I just didn't have the vocabulary or terms of reference I do now. In a way, though, the simple language made it all that much

more poignant: 'Here we are, we don't know why and then we die. Suck it up or cry'.

It is probably just a shock to anyone who knows me as a malignantly optimistic adult that once upon a time my inner world looked like that. I am just so thankful that I learned to express myself through a pen. How normal non-writery people manage their thoughts and emotions without an outlet such as art baffles me. Writing has been instrumental to my mental health and well-being throughout my entire life. Did I mention that I write to keep me sane? I have found the pen to be a wonderful companion and a worthy weapon against the many challenges which we are faced with in this world.

I am a professional writer of plays for stage, radio and television. I write short plays, one-act plays, full-length plays, plays written in verse, plays written in eighteenth-century English and plays written in Jamaican patois. There is nothing I won't try my hand at writing. I might be quite rare in that I love writing just about anything. I write essays, short stories, songs, rap, poetry, blog posts, articles, prayers, strongly worded letters of complaint, letters of recommendation, reviews, emails, WhatsApp messages, Facebook statuses, morning pages, journals, brainstorming, and planning.

I may not need poetry any more to express my deepest concerns and worries, but I still find answers and creative solutions through writing. Yeah, that whole 'writing to keep me sane' thing again. And, for anyone that is interested, the meaning of

life seems to have been the very thing which I was using to ask the question... The meaning of my life is expression. What are we but consciousness expressing itself? Now, what is consciousness? That question could start off a whole new anthology of poetry from yours truly.

Leah Chillery

Leah Chillery is a graduate of the BBC's College of Comedy where she story-lined on *Two Pints Of Lager And A Packet Of Crisps*, *Grown Ups* and her own sitcom pilot, *Ebony's Yard*. She has written four BBC Radio 4 afternoon plays – her most recent being *Losing My Penny*.

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Leah co-wrote the Bush Theatre hit *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover* which returned for a second season as *50 Ways To Leave Your Lover at Christmas*. Her play *Earl of Mo'Bay*, which premiered at the Lakeside Arts Theatre Nottingham, was shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award.

Leah is one of the first Felix Dexter Bursary winners, completing a comedy writing apprenticeship with the BBC. During that time, she developed her own sitcom *White Washed* and also gained experience on shows such as *Newsjack*,

Famalam and *Mrs Brown's Boys*. She wrote the screenplay for *Samuel's Trousers*, a short film released in 2020.

A recording of this talk can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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