

I'm still writing

Ingrid Persaud

Ay, how you mean you can't find me? Like you're cokee eye? Eid, Divali, Christmas – I'm always here in front the laptop. Once in a blue moon I might take a day off. And let me take in front before in front take me. Sitting down facing the screen and hitting the daily thousand-word target, are two completely different goals. I show up every day. But the muse? That woman is a story by sheself. Like she can't tell time because she's always late. Other days she can't even bother to reach my yard. I don't let it hurt my head. So long as I keep showing up at my desk, she'll arrive in her own sweet time.

Now I ain't go lie – it's a strange life. If you don't like being alone, jamming endlessly with your thoughts over days, weeks, years, then go try a next thing. Workshops and residencies exist to meet others, but writing is not a group activity. To get the words out of your head and onto the page demands solitary confinement.

So why do this hustle? Clearly my backside isn't glued to a desk chair for the little bit of money that writing pays. Growing up in Trinidad I saw that we as a society worshipped a good storyteller. Pure ego – I wanted a piece of that. But there was more. I wrote *Love After Love* in our Caribbean English without translation or apology. Claiming and celebrating my history

gave me the voice I'd been struggling to find. It doesn't get more political than that.

I write for myself. When the real world refuses me and says nah, you're unworthy, I write my autonomy into being. My stories are the ordinary people and places that are overlooked. Writing is how I make sense of being human. How else can I explore the conflicts in a human heart gone bazodee? Each new story creates space to bare our faults, doubts, hopes and dreams, and hold them up for scrutiny.

I force myself not to blink.

For stretches of time – it's never clear how long I'll be gone – writing takes me to lonely, dark places. It's unavoidable. Play shy and your work will show you weren't prepared to dig deep. I have chased after my fictional characters as they experience grief and losses. I join as they make choices to soothe themselves and I resist the impulse to quickly make it all better. At stake are issues of truth and authenticity. I'm not so dotish that I expect answers. What I hope is that on the page I might get closer to asking the right questions.

Writing helps me endure the chaos and commess of life. I take this journey to celebrate our amazing human spirit. Sometimes I wonder – what if we could measure the worth of words to alleviate our suffering? Would I stop writing if it proved to be of little value? I don't think so. I might 'fraid writing but I'm petrified of not writing.

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Ingrid Persaud

Ingrid Persaud is a late bloomer to the world of literature. She began her adult life as a lawyer, having studied law at the London School of Economics. She'd always yearned for an artistic life, an ambition which took her to study fine art at Goldsmith College and Central St. Martins. Up until her 40s, Ingrid Persaud taught law at Kings College, London, and also worked as a visual artist, before undergoing the transformation into a writer.

Apart from her Costa First Novel award 2021, her prizes and awards include the BBC National Short Story Award (2018) and the Commonwealth Short Story Prize (2017) for 'The Sweet Sop', a story exploring themes of fractured families, death and terminal illness, through the medium of chocolate.

Persaud's work is mostly set in Trinidad and Tobago, where she was born and grew up before relocating to the UK.

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

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