

“What does it mean to me to be a person of expectation?”

Honestly, I love schedules. I love sitting down with my calendar and mapping out the week ahead. I like making plans to catch up with a friend, and then looking forward to seeing her. I like planning out what I will make for dinner each night, and then methodically cooking it. If I have a deadline coming up, I'll work on it a little bit each day so that I can turn it in on time without feeling rushed. I don't do well under pressure. I like living slow and keeping to a routine. I move through my days like a contented sloth.

However...I like living slow in part because I am a slow worker. I am a playwright and it can take me months (years!) to finish one play. For this reason, I have to let go of expectations to a certain degree. Yes, I turn in new pages of my latest project to my collaborators on time. But what is on those pages – or if they need to exist at all – is not something I can predict or force.

I once went to a writing residency in rural Vermont expecting that I would start working on my next big project. I usually find that the time away from home and the creative energy sparked by other writers at retreats and conferences help me begin to write new plays. But when I got there and started thinking about all the ideas swirling around in my head, I realized that what I really wanted to do was learn more. One morning, after a few days of journaling and feeling stuck, I went to the studio center's library and pulled down all the books that seemed to be about the things I was interested in writing about. I piled them up in a tower on a table and spent hours poring over them. In two weeks, I dove into over twenty books, mostly nonfiction and autobiography. Even though I got much less writing done than I thought I would, I felt like I had made progress in my project. I was chaotically creative. I was acting on the impulses I had in the moment rather than forcing myself to stick to a schedule that wasn't serving me. I couldn't write scenes of a play without knowing what I wanted to write about.

Someone once told me that reading is the cheapest form of travel. I explored dozens of other worlds without ever leaving my studio. I don't always have the luxury to take time out of my life to do that. I seized the opportunity I had to take my brain places it hadn't ventured to before. Since returning from that residency, the world of my play has crystallized in unexpected ways. Over time I digested the notes I had taken from those books, and I know they continue to inform my work whether I'm entirely conscious of it or not.

I don't expect certain outcomes, but I *do* expect that inspiration in the form of images, connections, bits of dialogue, scraps of character, will present themselves when it is right for them to do so. I trust that I am exactly where I need to be.

I carry a notepad in my purse just in case I finally connect two thoughts while riding the metro. I sit on my porch in my rocking chair with a purple ink pen and passively let my body process the years it's lived through. When I write, I allow. I become a vessel for the flow. I choose to actively engage in the art of writing – that is discipline after all – but I trust that the material lives somewhere within me. And if it doesn't, maybe the next thing I read will be exactly what I need to learn.

The Muse knows my door is always open, but I don't know when she will arrive. I expect that she will.

~Olivia Haller