

The Benefits of Taking a Break by Michelle Morrison

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I've never been one to take much of a break from something that I'm into. For example, once I became "professional" dancer and then a studio owner, I constantly was working on the next choreography, the next costume, the next show. I'd seen far too many fellow dancers decide to take a year off and then never come back. I always believed (and in fact wrote a blog post) that creativity begets creativity. The more you keep that creative muscle working, the better it will perform.

In my last year as a studio owner, I was facing major burnout. I'd gone from a decade of having the studio be my main occupation to three years of owning the studio and working a full time job. It was increasingly harder to stay excited about the next choreography/costume/show. I decided to sell and once I did, I stopped teaching and choreographing. (I still danced...but performing is a whole different thing from teaching.)

For a year, my dance company and I just performed pieces I'd developed previously. Then it was time for something new. I found a piece of music, listened to it about a hundred times, then stood up and choreographed the entire piece. Not only that, I came up with new combinations of moves, and new formations for the group. It felt amazing!

Now I must correct my opening sentence. I have been a writer for more than twenty years and have written six novels. But the publishing business is brutal and trying to get published can be pretty hard on the old self-esteem. As a result, throughout those twenty years, I've allowed myself to be distracted by my dance career, having babies, and various other activities which offered far greater rewards. Months (and months) would lapse between spurts of the drive to write.

A few years ago I changed the genre in which I was writing. By the end of the first book, I'd learned a lot, but thought the manuscript wasn't worth pursuing. I put it away and went on to another one (which--shameless plug--you can buy [here!](#)). However, I recently went back to it to see if with some major revisions it could be salvaged and found myself pulled into the story and even crying at some of the scenes. When you've got some distance from a project--a book, a costume, a bookshelf, a kid--you're able to see it with fresh eyes. It doesn't mean it will be perfect of course, but you are able to appreciate it for what it is rather than what you thought it should be.

So my point (yes, there is one) is that a deliberate rest from something can recharge you and help you re-connect with whatever it was that drew you to that interest in the first place. I think the key is to keep aware of it, even as you don't engage with it, so that you don't let life pull you away from returning.

Getting Creative in Order to Be Creative by Michelle Morrison

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Why is it that those Instagram pictures of vegan refrigerators and Scandinavian bedrooms rooms appeal to me so much? Sure, I'm a new-ish vegetarian and I am really into the wabi-sabi, clean neutral look of home decor right now, but the appeal is much deeper and I had an "aha" moment about it in the smallest, weirdest way.

A few months ago, one of my desk drawers at work was just bugging me. My predecessor kept every scrap of paper and while I have implemented a paperless system, it still has taken me a while to clean out the drawers and shelves that had audition sign up sheets from twelve years ago!

At any rate, I needed a drawer in which to lock my purse and so got busy clearing out completely useless papers. It took all of like two minutes and before I put my purse in the drawer which now only had three slim file folders, I felt the greatest sense of peace looking at that otherwise empty drawer. I know it sound nutty, but the drawer just seemed so full of potential!

I realized how much crammed drawers of clothes, cabinets of food, and files of papers ultimately overwhelms our creativity. This was something I think I've intuitively known for years as I've constantly reorganized and cleared out possessions, but for some reason this silly little moment in time clicked everything in place.

I know some artists are messy and if that works for you, great, but for me, nothing makes me want to create like an empty work table.

Since being inspired by the zero-waste movement, one of my projects has been to declutter my kitchen cabinets.

Jam packed utensil drawers also stress me out. As do those cheapo plastic spatulas and spoons. Having fewer cooking utensils has made cooking and cleaning so much more relaxing. It's true!

I have a deep cabinet into which packets of pasta and boxes of rice go to die. It drives me nuts when I come home from the grocery store and put something away only to find I already had three half-empty packages of the same thing. Right?

This project was immensely helpful. I want to incorporate more lentils, brown rice, and quinoa into our daily diet but I would just forget about them buried in the cabinet when I made my weekly menus. Now they are out, in plain sight, and rather inspiring in their glass jars. They have become staples in our plant-based diet. Converting to this storage system allowed me to find three different types of pasta in stock--when really, we all prefer the penne style.

So my goal for the foreseeable future is to eat up what we have; donate the bowls, platters, and kitchen gadgets that seemed like such a great idea when I bought them but just took up valuable real estate; and only buy what I know we will actually eat!

I will do so creatively, finding new recipes and hacks for what I'm keeping. And then my plan is to be so

inspired by the open spaces in my cabinets and refrigerator that I'll be even more creative in the kitchen. That's the plan anyway...

When You Thought It Was Broken But You Didn't Know What It Was Supposed To Be by Michelle Morrison

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I was a medieval romance writer for years even though I loved to read Regencies. So when I decided to try my pen at writing a Regency romance, I did my homework, plotted it out, did way more research than was necessary, and wrote.

Then I did an edit or two and thought, "This is not grabbing me like I intended." So I put it away as a learning experience and started another one. This one I liked, so I published it (Lord Worthing's Wallflower). Then I wrote a sequel to Lord Worthing (well in romance there are never sequels because who wants to read about all the day to day drudgery that happens after the "happily ever after" ending? But it's a sequel in that it focuses on the best friend of the Worthing heroine).

I had finally found my writer's groove at this point. For years I'd had a love/hate relationship with writing. I really wanted to tell a good story, but egads, the act of sitting in front of a computer and dragging words out of your head is ridiculous. So I'd started this sequel and as was often the case in those pre-groove years, I stopped in the middle to finish another project. I finally went back to it by printing it up and reading through it to get back in the zone of the characters. I was away from any computer when I got to the end of what I'd written, but I knew exactly what needed to happen next, so I grabbed an old spiral notebook of my kid's and started writing longhand. I could barely keep up with the words! I filled those pages then bought another spiral and kept going.

I think, for me, something about handwriting being slower than typing allows my brain time to build up a sentence or two. I'm a firm believer in the power of the subconscious brain and the whole pen and paper trick really seems to give my subconscious mind time to work out what I want to say so that my flighty awake brain doesn't have to try to force words into a cohesive sentence. I don't know, it works for me...

At any rate (I'm beginning to see why my books are long and why I need to edit more...), A Lady's Secret was finished and given an edit, then sent over to an editor friend for further massaging. I was left still in the groove of writing without a project. It was at this time I remembered my first Regency. I dug it out, printed it out (I cannot read off of a screen which is probably why I have a hard time writing on one), and started editing to see if it could be salvaged.

What I found was that I really enjoyed the story. Of course it needed cleaning up and editing. It needed about 20,000 words cut (I've so far only managed to pare down 13,000). But whatever preconceptions I'd had a few years ago about what it was supposed to be had been forgotten and I was able to enjoy it for the story it had become.

At any rate, it's been much easier editing a manuscript that I haven't looked at in years, probably because it's not fresh in my mind and I can pretend someone else wrote it!

So now it looks as though *The Lady Ordinary* will be published before we learn what happened to Eleanor Chalcroft and her mystery lover!