

## Me and Amy Dala

Whoever said white is right never stared at a blank page.

I don't have a deadline. I don't have Peter Parker's editor breathing down my neck and breaking pencils. I'm cool, I'm relaxed, I'm a genius, I'm talented, I'm in demand, "I'm lying, I'm screwed. Sorry Sister Mary Elizabeth Ygnacio Peter Paul and Mary.

I smack myself hoping some fortitude or attitude gets knock loose. Not again. "Don't waste your gift...don't waste your gift...don't waste your gift."

When I'm driving or looking at weird people-sorry, unusual people or gorgeous men, my mind is flowing like a rushing river and the ideas are popping up like fish scales at the fish market. But as soon as my butt sits in front of the computer-crickets. That guy on TED Talk said, "keep your ass in the chair". I'm in the chair, ass and all, but it's like my inner editor has a noose around my neck and I'm tippy toe on the stool. Since I believe more is better I have editors. The rude one, the belittling one, the impatient one and, the gloom and doom one, etc.

I skim my Pinterest writing pins. Just need a kick start or kick in the butt. I click on strategies. Skimming-skimming. Ah! Write early in am. Nope-sleeping. Write late at night. Nope-sleeping. Write lying down. What? Sleeping. I grab my writing companion, a vibrating fuzzy wiener dog with a witch hat. I laugh at her exaggerated tooth full grin and place her under my armpit and squeeze. BARK-squeeze, BARK. Her high pitch bark relaxes the noose. I mist my writing area aka writing altar with lavender and spearmint and feel the calm but when I rub my feet together my calloused feet uncalm me. "Damn girl get a pedicure."

I haven't been to the nail shop since my last visit when I mistakenly told Amy I was a writer.

"Ooo, you ya writah?" Amy asks.

"Yeah." I answer sheepishly. Amy is impressed and she yells at your next foot co-worker in a non-english language. It sounded like wood being chopped.

"Chop-chop-chop-chop-chop-chop!" says Amy.

Her neighbor, Lisa, is also giving a customer the dee-lux foot treatment. She leans back. Eyes widen, "Ooo, you ya writah?"

I nod again, more convincing than before.

"Wooowww." Lisa says. She and Amy talk in that non-english language while they rub the hell out of me and my neighbor's feet. The caw-caw of what ever the hell they're saying was bad enough but when the pumice stone was rapidly approaching raw feet meat I screamed.

"Shut up-shut up!"

They withdrew from both our feet like touching hot coals and I slipped and slid out of there holding my flip flops.

I pull my silk writing kimono tighter around me.

Screw strategies. I search inspiration. I stare at my wooden Buddha sitting lotus. "Whatcha got fat man?" The saying underneath him says "you don't have to be right to write." I scroll through my pinned inspirations. I roll my eyes at all the BS platitudes that used to fire me up but now feels like the same kind of BS when you look bad and your best friend says you smell nice. This is a hell of a long way from winning the English award in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Scrolling-OVERCOMING WRITER'S BLOCK is like so in my face. I click on it. I rub my silk chenille ball over my face as I open the first pin.

Skimming-skimming. Ooo, a survey. It asks, "do get you anxious at your computer?" I wouldn't say anxious. I'm not one of those nervous Nelly's that can't-Yes. "Do you delay writing?" Sometimes. I survey my living space. Nothing out of place or to be done. Hmm. "Do you experience increase heart rate and breathing, sweaty palms?" I've heard other people say that but that's not me ok? Skimming more of the article, it seems my very minimal and insignificant symptoms are triggering something called the Amy Dala in my brain. "The Amy Dala is the fight or flight response to danger." That's what's leaving me hanging? "Miss Amy Dala. We need to talk." Hope she speaks better English than my foot spa Amy. My wiener barks "squeek". I got to talk to Amy Dala and tell her to cut the block out.

My breath quickens so I reach for my lemongrass and apricot organic non-GMO kombucha smoothie. I take an adult size swig. My head snaps back and my vision blurs. Damn! Should have put it in the fridge last night. My mouth puckers for a while-how long I can't say since I can't see the clock. When my vision clears, I reach for my writing affirmation journal. It's under the couch again and I lean way over to get it.

While grunting and farting bending forward to reach the damn life affirming affirmation journal I ponder the problem. Amy Dala, Amy Dala. How do I talk to someone in my head? Priest? No, that's the soul. Psychologist/chiatrist? No, they make you do all the work and take the credit and your credit card. It's in my head. How do I get in my head? I need to tap into that golden wonderful creative right side of my brain which in my case is my whole brain. I imagine two-count'em-two left brain cells huffing and puffing from doing left brain stuff like paying bills and organizing. Ooo, another great idea for a short story. SMACK! OK later. Got to talk to Amy first. How to I get to her? Mindfulness? Too long. Drugs? Good grief this is exhausting. All I need is something that just manages to calm the mind but not lose it. Maybe an organic something. Yeah that should work. Organic mild mind attenuating substance. Sounds like Eastern medicine stuff to me. But where?

I wander around China town excelling at looking like a tourist. I stumble down a street looking up at signs trying to figure out what they're saying. They're all in Chinese and I did ok in English so I go into an apothecary. The Chinese man greets me with a big tooth full grin nodding continuously.

"Uh, hey-hello. English?"

The smiling Chinese man continues to nod. He waves his hand around the store like Vanna. I follow his hand.

"What do you have for illumination...of the mind?"

Same smiling Sam. He continues to extend his arm, welcoming me to pick something. "I need something to get in touch with myself." I palm my head. "I want to get in my head. Get it?" The smiling Chinese man points next door. I peer out the door to a bakery.

I stand outside at the bakery. All the cream puffs and decorated pastries line up like toy soldiers behind the dirty glass cabinet. I go inside. A Chinese woman disregards me.

“What you want, sir”

Sir? The middle-aged Chinese woman with flatter than the floor affect looks at me.

“Um, hm...the guy next door sent me over to-to find something for my mind. “

No change in affect. I look at the pastries wondering how this sissy sweet stuff is gonna introduce me to Miss Amy. “Uh which one will-will get me in touch with my mind?”

“They all the same man, pick one.”

Really? In 2019 customer service has escaped China town.

“Um, well give me a minute” I implore.

She scoffs and barks-I mean it sounded like a dog barking something in Chinese. I don't know Chinese, but I did ok in English and I'm pretty sure I heard dumbass. It was in Chinese, so it was more like dumba assah but I ain't no dummy.

“I'm looking for something to blow mind” I confess.

In the King's English replete with African American neck actions she says, “like a gun?” F U is hurling toward my vocal cords so I stomp toward the door in my hush puppies. As I reach the door, she touches my shoulder and hands me a stark white card with coal black letters that seem to levitate above the card. She smells like lavender and spearmint, but I couldn't take my eyes off the card, so I thanked her and left.

I hadn't noticed how dim the bakery was until the sunshine slaps my retina. I hurry under an awning and the caw-caw of two Chinese men negotiating chicken feet fades as I squint at the card. No name on it, just an address. Even google maps can't find this place but for \$20 a kid named Chin-Chin leads me right to it. It is the proverbial booth in the back in the corner in the dark. He studies me, with knitted brow and points at the end of an alley.

“Down there.” Chin Chin says. He presses the card in my hand and is gone. I would say vanished but that would be weird.

At the end of the alley is the end of the alley. There is no door just a slab of plywood leaning against an entrance. I knock, the knot in my throat crowding my trachea. No answer. I kick at the door with no confidence. It doesn't move. I pick up a stick and try to push it, nothing. I grab the slab with my hands-nothing. I look at the card again. Less fear and more frustration give me the courage to whack, kick, push at the stupid piece of plywood that is merely leaning over the entrance. I run at it and land inside a dark hollow area. My knees smack the cold concrete floor. “Owww”. I push myself up and on. My silent steps walk toward the light. A candle flickers in the distance. What the hell right? I take a picture with my phone of the dark space and immediately realize the futility in that and proceed. I resist the urge to call out. I walk toward the candle accepting my death. As I reach the candle a figure appears.

“Oh snap man you scared the crap out of me.”

“Scared the crap out of you? You scared me.” I counter.

This lanky kimono wearing dude extends his hand. “Leonard man, What’s up?”

“Hey Leonard man, I wanna.”

His skin laughs. “I wanna what?”

My eyes rolled a full three sixty. “I haven’t heard that before. So original. I must be in the right place.”

“Whatcha doing here? Probably lost, we’re closed.”

I show him the card. He sighs heavily handing me back the card.

“This way.”

Leonard man leads me pass the flickering candle into another room with a light bulb in each corner. Just the bulbs, no lamps or cords. The room is dressed with a desk, a sofa without cushions and a one legged futon leaning against the wall.

“Have a seat.”

I sit on the desk, my legs dangling like a 5-year-old in the doctor’s office. A guy walks in, 50’s, Santa belly. A half-smoked cigarette hangs from his lower lip. The embers glow with each inhale. He touches the futon and it lowers to the floor like a garage door. It lands level on one leg and he lowers his hefty self onto it. He attempts to sit lotus style but his belly and woeful short legs won’t allow it.

“Screw it”. He looks at me, the cigarette glowing. “So I wanna, thanks for not sitting on the futon. I hate it when you folks sit on the futon then I’ve got no damn where to sit and you guys came to see me and so I shouldn’t be the one inconvenienced. Right?”

I nod fascinated by the cigarette that flicks up and down with every syllable but doesn’t fall. There’s still no smoke from the red embers. “You’re welcome...sir.”

“No need to be so formal, you may call me your supreme being.”

No need to be so formal? Ok, I’ll address him as such but the damn cigarette has got to be the supreme being because the rest of him looks like a goddam Harold or Ernie.

“Stop flipping out about the cigarette and my name dude.”

“Huh, you’re in my head?”

“I am your head.”

“What? You’re in my head?”

His supreme being rolls his eyes better than me. “C’mon, you seek to be in your head right? So, you can beg for your block to go away?”

I nod, I think I nod. I don’t know anymore. After I find Amy I’ll look for reality. I’m in my head? This is a pretty crappy place. My head has a slab of plywood for a door. My head is dark and cavernous and not

in a good way. What's up with the magical chain smoking? Is it chain smoking if the cigarette is never extinguished? The fat dude is the communicator for my brain?

"Uh, the communicator for my brain?" the fat dude aka supreme being says. Your mind dude, not your brain.

What's the difference?

His holiness rolls her eyes. HER EYES! His holiness has morphed into an older woman that still looks good with Dolly Parton boobs.

"You changed!"

"You change your mind don't you?" He, uh she still calls me dude and her voice is the same and that cigarette! The same.

"Look dude, you want answers to that question or you want answers to the question?"

What is the question, I ponder. And, why is he still calling me dude? The events of the day play back in my mind. "Oh yeah-I want to talk to my Amy Dala. Miss or Ms. Amy Dala."

Her supreme being stares. I feel x-rayed. "Look dude, that's a pretty unstable place. It's fickle, anything can get it-YOU- going. And you're off to the races across a field, fighting for your life or hiding under the couch.

"Under the couch?"

"Yeah"

"Why would I hide under the couch?"

"The Amy Dala as you call it, is emotions." Her supreme being is now the doppelganger for Spock. Yeah that Spock. Does that make me Captain Kirk? Spock is holding an almond that pulsates with his words. The cigarette is gone. He speaks Spock like about the properties of the almond. I'm half in awe that it's Spock and is it really him? Also, half frustrated because I want to talk to Amy Dala and it's an inanimate nut-is that redundant? Spock stops talking.

"You appear disinterested."

"I'm honored that you would come all this way to explain stuff but I'm just trying to overcome writer's block..."

A unified "WHOA DUDE" comes from the room. Suddenly Spock aka his supreme being, Leonard man, the Chinese lady, the smiling Chinese man, Chin-Chin and the Chinese men arguing over chicken feet and the almond which now has eyes and red lips like an M&M are all looking at me with arms crossed.

"That's a whole nother region dude" says Leonard man.

"You wanted something to blow your mind?" asks the rude Chinese lady.

"Writer's block has already done that" says the smiling Chinese man. "You need something to put it back together."

“Maybe you should copy someones writing you admire, like Stephen King”, says one of the chicken feet Chinese men.

“That’s dumb”, says the other chicken feet Chinese man, “you need to free right to warm up.”

They continue to argue about what’s best for me. I feel hot and look for the door. Where was that damn candle? The entrance to the room has changed as much as the people in it.

“So, you’re afraid of a tiny flimsy piece of white paper?” Spock asks? Is that right Iwanna? What is your last name. Is it Wright? That is only logical. Right?

I nod like a sinner before Saint Peter.

Everyone laughs-big belly laughs. I feel like I’m falling and naked. My head hangs with the weight of shame and frustration. Take five deep breaths I tell myself, remembering a relaxing technique. Fortified I face the critics. “Look, I want to speak to Miss Amy Dala.” I demand.

There’s a mixture of non-verbal responses. Most are unbelief the rest dismissive. “Did you mean a...MIG...da...la?” the almond asks.

The almond looking M&M glares at me. She’s holding a long rope with a noose at one end. “Yeah Miss Dala. I thought the first name was Amy.” I take a step back.

When the laughter quiets down this time Leonard Man says, “You’re bout as dumb as the paper you’re afraid of.”

I start to protest but Spock says “ Don’t be so critical Leonard. She’s already put the entire weight of the universe on herself to write a short story about nothing.”

“Hey! It ain’t nothing. It’s something, it’s a really good something. I just gotta get it all sorted out. Got to make it good-perfect so I can win.”

“Win what?” asks the almond as she fondles the noose?

“A contest.” I proudly proclaimed.

“To the New Yorker?”

“No.”

“The Atlantic?”

“No.”

“What man?”

“The Walnut Creek Gazette.”

“Walnut Creek Gazette.” The group chants endlessly. I try to leave but my body is heavy, so heavy.

“Shut up-shut up!” They instantly obey even his supreme being, I feel something in my hand. It’s a stool, a simple wooden stool. Each critic is holding a noose looking steely eyed at me. They circle me, snapping the noose. I swing the stool at them with everything in me and fall. And keep falling.

Then, the room is empty, my vision is blurred. Blinking clears my sight and I'm looking at my wiener writing companion on the floor with me. I'm on the floor, half under the couch.

How did I get on the floor-my floor? I grunt and groan to my feet not so much from effort or because it's painful but to validate that I exist. I plop down in my chair and my pin is still open to overcoming writer's block. What the hell? Naw-naw that was not a dream. C'mon. Amy is a nut or maybe I am. Well I rejoice that the humiliation was a dream. I adjust my writing altar and began writing-ninja fast when I notice the stark white card with the black letters and that address on it.

I reach for the smoothie.