

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### DO YOU KNOW....

#### How to Loosen Envy's Grip on your Writing Progress: Right Your Relationships

Kathleen T. Heinrich

Start right now  
 take a small step  
 you can call your own  
 don't follow  
 someone else's  
 heroics, be humble  
 and focused,  
 start close in....  
 David Whyte

No one will ever know, so be honest. How would you feel if a colleague's manuscript was accepted within a week by the very same editor who rejected your manuscript after a 9-month wait? If your Dean recommended someone for a radio interview who'd written one article on a topic you've published on forever? Or if a rival received a scholarly achievement award you were sure would go to you?

If just reading these scenarios spike your vital signs, you may be feeling the effects of envy. Even the most successful authors can find themselves resenting writing accomplishments they wish were their own. Yet, nurse authors are often reluctant to recognize envious urges in themselves, much less admit to them publically, which is why envy-driven comparisons fit so well into this year's columns of delicate dilemmas that impede writing progress when left unexamined. So after telling you about a recent run-in with my own envious inner critic that turned me into a self-forgetting amnesiac, I'll share some tips for righting your relationships that can return you to your writing with enthusiasm replenished.

#### Corrosive Comparisons Cause My Self-Forgetting

I GOT A BOOK CONTRACT!!!! When I read this exuberant subject line in an email message from a dear colleague-friend, my first response was far from joyous. In an instant, that can't breathe, withering feeling in my chest shriveled the secret and succulent pleasure I'd been taking in toying with my own book ideas. An inner voice, in a Gollum-like whisper, hissed, "Typical! Here you are all puffed up about an idea or two and he's got a full-on book contract. You might as well give up right now and go find some little article to write."

When my colleague's gain became my loss, amnesia took over: I forgot who I was and I lost sight of my own accomplishments. Self-forgetting aside, I knew envy was swallowing my self-esteem whole. Come to find out, the Latin word for envy ~ invidia ~ means non-sight: those in envy's grip are blinded to their own gifts and talents. While this explained the frantic emptiness I felt, I wondered

how creative writers make sense of their envy attacks. According to artist and author, SARK, all authors have inner critics. She gives the name "Comparer" to that inner critic who always finds one lacking. Like my Gollum-esque whisperer, Comparers "...can get very frisky when we start measuring ourselves. Especially if we haven't put [writing] out in any physical form yet and it's inside of our head, we can actually stop ourselves by using others to compare ourselves against" (SARK 2013).

### **3 Ways to Turn Envious Comparisons to Right Relationship**

Comparing my puny book ideas to my colleague's glorious contract sure stopped me cold. Comparisons like these coarsen nurse authors' relationships with themselves, with their writing, and with the colleagues whose accomplishments they envy. These 3 steps explain how righting these relationships turned my inner critic's comparisons into a celebration for my colleague's success and a renewal of my writer-ly flow:

- *Right Your Relationship with Yourself* by returning to that which reminds you of who you are. For me, this meant taking myself to a physical place that brings me joy: the sitting porch of our family's summer cottage. To-ing and fro-ing in my favorite rocking chair, I re-read appreciative emails and thank you notes from faculty I've helped get published. Then I compiled a Gratitude List of those who've mentored me and the good fortune, rewards and recognitions for writing that have come my way. With no room for self-forgetting, there is no place for corrosive comparisons.
- *Right Your Relationship with Your Writing* by revisiting your own project. To do this, I opened my computer file entitled "Book II" and counted over 80 documents with snippets of ideas for chapters. After that, I flipped through the folder sitting atop my study shelf that was fattened to overflow with articles I'd cut and copied on related topics. These visuals reminded me that the book incubating in me is very different than the one my colleague is contracted to write. Knowing there's plenty of room in the world for both our books released me from my win-lose lockdown. With no room for corrosive comparisons, there is no place for competition.
- *Right Your Relationship with The One You Envy* by tattling on your inner Comparer. While nurse authors often keep envious feelings to themselves, creative writers speak openly about authors whose writing sickens them with envy. Witness this author's message to his fellow writer, "This idea is so brilliant I want to go to your house with a shovel, and I want to kill you and bury you in the backyard and steal your idea" (Bourne, 2013). While I'm still working up to his blend of forthright and funny, I did call my colleague to offer my congratulations and copped to snuffing out my own book dreams when I heard about his contract. This confession freed me to celebrate his success and revived my interest in adding to Book II's files. With no room for competition, there is no reason to stifle the writing process.

### **Conclusion**

If all authors have inner critics and Comparers are commonplace, then envy-free diets (Lopate 2013) are doomed to fail. So the next time your Comparer poisons your writing progress, do not give into self-forgetting. Do right your relationship with yourself, with your work, and with the colleague you envy.

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Acknowledgement to Beverly Sastri, my peer mentor, whose tattling on her own inner writing critics has taught me how liberating it is to tattle on mine.

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