Spring 1974

Michele Murray (1934-1974)

The Feminist Press

Follow this and additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq

Part of the Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq/130

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Special Collections at CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women's Studies Quarterly by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact AcademicWorks@cuny.edu.
MICHELE MURRAY (1934 - 1974)

Feminist, novelist, poet, and critic, Michele Murray died of cancer on March 14, at the age of 40. Book editor for the National Observer, she also published a fine literary anthology, A House of Good Proportion: Images of Women in Literature, and two children’s books, Nellie Cameron and The Crystal Nights (see review in Women’s Studies Newsletter, Vol. II, no. 1). She was an early and warm friend of The Feminist Press. We print below most of a letter she wrote in response to our first News/Notes in the fall of 1971.


Since then I’ve done a considerable amount of editing & ghosting for an educator, been associate editor and book editor of the American Journal of Art Therapy, continued to review for the National Catholic Reporter and also for the National Observer, run a children’s book column six times a year for Children’s House magazine, and had more than forty poems published in little magazines.

So, you see I’ve been struggling along for quite a time now! What I’d like to share are some things I’ve learned from these long & often good but lonely years.

1. It never gets any better. Don’t wait for the kids to grow up before you start working! Mine are all in school now, one only a half-day. BUT school is only five hours a day five days a week nine months a year, minus holidays and all the times they are sick. And the school wants you for a zillion things—in my case, FOUR different schools. And the kids need help with French & math, they need to be driven here & there, they still have to be tooted to doctor & dentist for a long long time.

I found that they were & are just plain jealous of the typewriter. When I’m working it means that I’m not devoting every waking minute to them. They are right. I’m not. Why should I? They still interrupt every chance they get & act as if I’m doing nothing. But I fight back!

Since 1961 I have tried (tried!) to write mornings from 9 to 12 five days a week. I guess that I succeed about 60% of the time. When I can’t write, I read, or file or answer letters or retype material. Sometimes there are unavoidable errands, medical appointments & suchlike. That’s life. But the framework is Mama writes from 9 to 12. True, the telephone rings & people come to the door, but damn it, I’m not going to let them stop me!

2. Learn to work differently. By the time I’ve put down the first words of a review or article, I’ve pretty much written it in my head while I’m ironing or cooking. It took time to learn to work like that but it was time & effort well spent. I don’t write a chapter on my book unless it’s set in my head before I start. Of course I write and rewrite and make changes; however, I’m not wasting those precious three hours sitting in front of a blank sheet of paper.

3. Specialize in one motherly-housewifey job that pleases the kids & gives you time to think. I happen to like to cook & bake very much. When I’m stuck, I make bread. Great for thinking, especially when I’m working on a poem. Good change of pace. And you are Being A Good Mother & kids & husband love you for it. But it could be sewing or refinishing furniture or making costumes or candy or whatever.

4. Value yourself, damn it! And value your work! No one else will if you won’t, not the kids, not your husband, not the PTA lady who wants you to handle membership, not friends who call when you’re writing, not the teachers who want you to drive on fieldtrips. Do they care whether you write or not? No, they don’t. So why should you care about the membership of the PTA? Unless, of course, you want to do the job & can. Which leads to:

5. Don’t feel guilty because you don’t care about the PTA or about the kids’ field trips. They’ll manage without you. Maybe better than they can with you. Look at it that way. It’s probably true. You can always talk to a class about writing & be a living example of a professional woman for all the girls in the class. That’s a helluva lot more valuable.

6. No self-pity. Sure it’s tough. And lonely. Terribly lonely. But who cares whether you write or not? YOU do. So don’t blame the neighbors or other women in the area for not being receptive. Find people who are or keep on alone. No one says it has to be easy, not for me, not for you, not for anyone. But O the joy of doing it!

My husband has been a consistent support. He knew what he was getting into—we met at a writing class at The New School for Social Research and he registered for a course in Melville that I was taking just to get to know me better! And he knew I was going for my MA when we were married. But he’s a rare ‘un—he likes intelligent, independent, mature women! He has helped whenever he can & when needed, especially when we had three small children. Now he is busier with his career and part-time writing, travels a bit, and is not so available, but when I need him, he’s there . . .

May all the sisters find their way & live into it to find themselves!