

Pi in the Sky

by Michelle Elvy

Last night I was confronted with the question, *Why Do You Write?* It came on a writers' website which I just joined. I wrote up a bio and list of favorite authors and books for my Profile. And then came to the question "Why do you write?"

Which always stumps me.

Because, if you're not careful, you wind up writing about the tedium of your own inspiration to a soon-to-be-uninterested audience. Because it invites a kind of self-reflection and profundity that makes me squirm. I like writing about myself, don't get me wrong. I like writing about things that inspire me, enrage me, tickle my fancy. I write because I feel self-absorbed and generous at once.

But you can't write that sort of thing on a Profile.

So: *why do I write?*

To get it all down, to seek answers, to shout out to the world...

Yes, of course.

To express feeling, to capture people or places, to connect to my Self and my Self to Others... Yes, also.

But it's more than that.

It's not about mere description, shallow or deep. It's emotion, mechanics, and discipline all at once.

It's not because of some abstract "will" — the will within ("I *have* to write," she exclaimed keenly) or the will of the piece itself ("The story just writes itself," I heard someone say for about the millionth time the other day).

It's because of the *impossibility* of it, the sisyphian feat of putting pen to paper. Because you are never, *ever* finished, and therein lies the challenge.

I have written before that a person is an outcome derived from a sum of experiences, events, and stories, all arranged seemingly willy-nilly yet producing precisely and only one result. I think the same is true for the tales we tell. And to tell those stories, to create one precise outcome while the other voices, characters, plotlines,

perspectives, nuances, whatever remain lurking at the edges: that is a triumph.

The possibility for numerous outcomes — the possibility of anything, really — lives on the writer's page. To write about that possibility, and to do it with the precision of black on white, word on page, is a thrill.

To face the impossible, really.

I read something yesterday about "the Mount Everest of the mind." It was said by a guy who meditates his way through life by memorizing as much of Pi as he can. His record came in 2007 when he typed out 15,314 digits from memory.

I read that article because it was March 14, and my friends on Facebook were passing around cool stories about this remarkable, mysterious number (my North American friends, that is: never mind that to the rest of the world March 14th is designated by 14.3).

Then I carried on with my day, wrote a few lines of one thing, discarded some lines from another, and stumbled around midnight onto the writers' website with that impossible question.

Which has led me here, where I'm thinking about Pi.
3.14159 26535 89793 23846 26433 83279 50288 41971...

A random and ordered series of things.

A story: a seemingly simple circle with complexities embedded within.

Mystery. One wants to know more.

Irrational and transcendental — the way someone described pi. Could just as well be about a good story.

Pattern in apparent chaos — like the last 24 hours, which began with spilt milk and ended up here.

Pi is precision and infinite possibility all bundled up together. Which is exactly how I think of writing.

So why do I write?

To express endless possibility with one discrete assortment of letters.

Technologists and mathematicians struggle with the "randomness" of pi's digits all the time. "For all we know," says

David Bailey, "just out beyond where we calculated, there are no more 5s."

For all we know. Or don't know.

So I tell a story.

And do it again and again and again.

