

Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

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Inchy by Inchy: The Wisest Words I've Ever Heard



The most important words of wisdom I've ever heard about being a writer – or living a life, for that matter – came out of the mouth of my late friend Janet.

The people who write the books, she said – or paint the pictures, or compose the operas, or design the buildings – are not necessarily those who are the *very best* at doing those things.

Instead, they're the ones who actually sit down and do the job. In other words, the people who accomplish things are the people who accomplish things.

You may not be Leonardo da Vinci, Janet said. OK, you're *definitely* not Leonardo da Vinci. Janet was an art historian, so she knew.

But Leonardo didn't wait until he sure he was Leonardo before he set out to do all the amazing things he did.

There's no authority on high, Janet said, that appoints and anoints some elite group to produce society's cultural treasures. Those treasures are produced by the people who get to work producing them.

I kept Janet's words in mind as I began working on *We Are Here*, my memoir about my journey into post-Holocaust Lithuania, land of my Jewish forebears.

Her advice kept me going for the full ten years from conception to publication. I still think of Janet as I respond to readers, write opinion pieces, and give talks.

As Janet summed it up: "Inchy by inchy, Leonardo da Vinci." The ones who create are the ones who create.

Ellen Cassedy is the author of *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust* (Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2012). To see all of her Writing Tips, visit her website at www.ellencassedy.com.