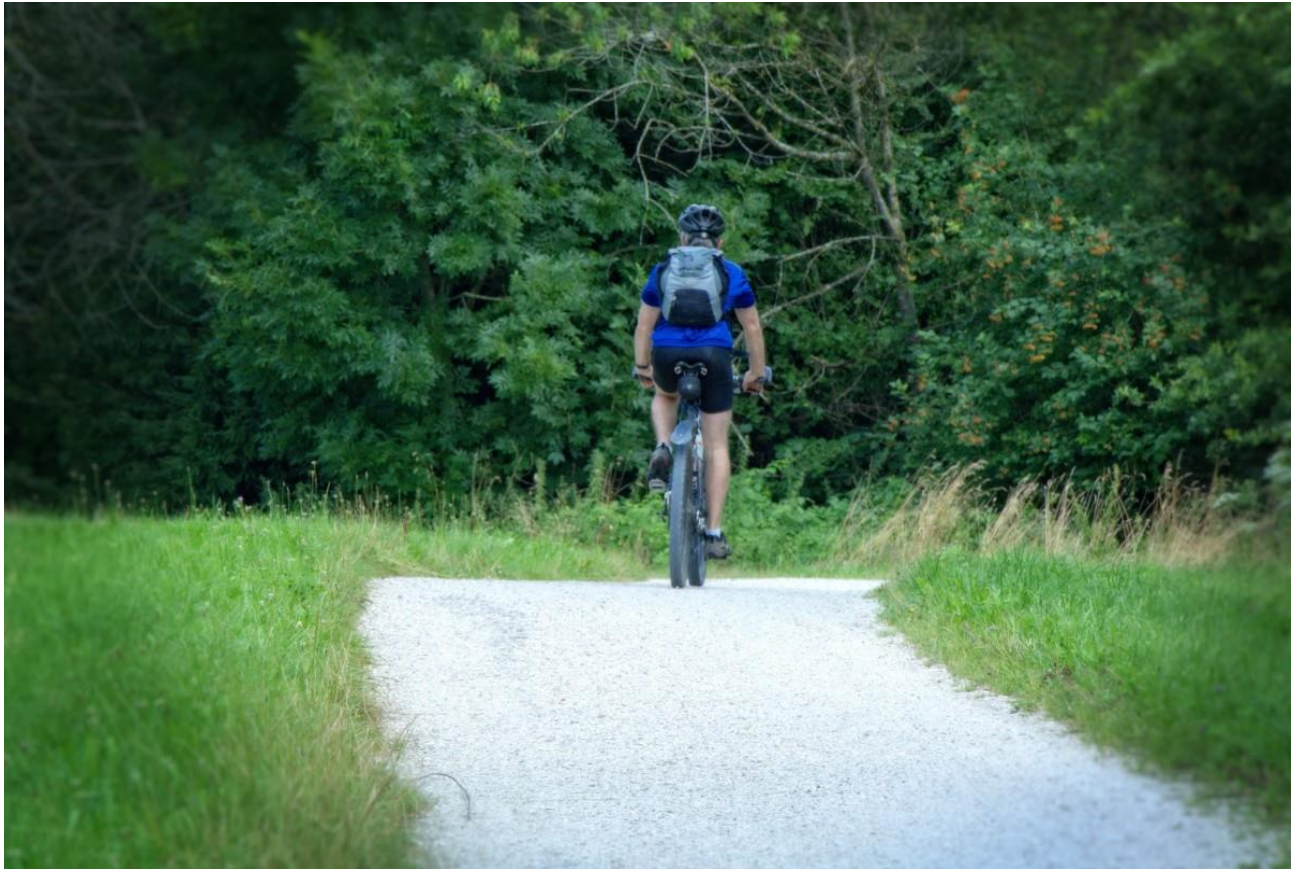


Writing Tips from Ellen Cassedy

www.ellencassedy.com

Are you a writer, or a person who writes?



A friend says that when she begins a writing project, she has no idea where she's headed. All she's about is her love of language. She doodles and she noodles. She delights in words, their sounds and their senses.

Out of that playful, trancelike state, a way forward emerges. Before long, she latches on to an idea, a structure. From there she makes her way toward something she urgently needs to say.

Another friend proceeds in an entirely different fashion. When he sits down to write, it's because he knows he has something he wants to say. He explores that something by setting down his thoughts, without worrying too much about how he's expresses them.

Once he has a draft, he hones and refines, laboring to make his ideas as clear and appealing as possible. When he's done everything he can do, the work goes out into the world.

I fall into both camps. Some days, I'm like my first friend. On those days I'm likely to define myself as *a writer*. Other days, I'm more like my second friend. On those days I'm apt to think of myself as *a person who writes*.

On the days when I'm *a writer*, what matters most is my love of language. Messing around with words. What on this earth is more important than spelling, usage, punctuation, word origins, syntax, diction, all the nooks and crannies of our beloved English language? I like cryptograms, crosswords, translating from other languages. Rhymes, rhythms, alphabets, assonance. Tongue twisters, riddles, meters. Images, moods, scenes.

On these days, I'm not a cyclist; I'm a traveler. Writing is an end in itself, not a vehicle. Writing is both the journey and the destination.

On the days when I'm *a person who writes*, however, what matters most are my ideas. Writing is a tool, and I'm a craftsman. My book, *We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust*, is the center of a communications campaign, through which I explore, in public, how we can use our understanding of history--even the horrific history of genocide--to create a more tolerant future.

On these days, what's important is not only the words between covers, but also the talks I give, the articles I contribute to magazines and blogs, the

conferences I attend, the interviews and meetings I seek out with others who are involved with history, Jewish genealogy, ethics.

For some of us, perhaps, the writing process simply can't be divided in two. As with music, the notes can't be separated from the song.

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.