

" my favorite car is a bicycle, and why I must create things vs. making them."

Dear Reader,

Lets just admit it. This feels new to both of us. Writting letters. Or reading them. Maybe, its because we've had our phones for too long. Maybe its because we don't really know each other, so why would we write one another?? But do we really have to know someone to write them? Remember "pen friends"?? Back when the world was larger? I never had one, a pen friend. My father did, when he was young. His pen friend was a nurse in Australia, he was a student in Bombay. They exchanged pictures and letters. And then one day, they stopped writting each other.

I suspect they didn't write much at all, just some details of their lives - their cities, favorite color, favorite food, the people at home... hobbies? "I hope this letter finds you in the best of health!" Then she writes back - "I am in the best of health, my patients, not so much, I am a nurse you see." Things like that... The thing about letters is, dear reader, that when we write a letter to someone, we are also writting it to ourselves. A letter is different from an interview in that sense, interviews, are full of lite lies, like lite beer. Low on calories, and low on taste. Not all of them, but

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by and large. People lie in interviews, a lot. Most of those lies don't hurt anyone. And between the lies, there are worthy truths... stray thoughts, pauses... deliberations on process, craft, and creativity that leave us, how can I put it? "satisfied?" I much rather read an interview - like, lies and all, than a boring self indulgent monolog that meanders, runs, stops, starts, saunters, hops, scurries...

But, I'll tell you what, dear reader, now that we are "pen friends," I can be honest with you. I feel like I can talk to you, rather, I can talk to myself while pretending that I am talking to you. We can get to know each other even as I get to know myself better. That is the beauty of letters. I've been thinking a lot lately about why I feel so poor. Don't get me wrong, I am not as poor as I used to be. And real poverty, the kind that crushes the soul and shrinks the body. The kind that requires deep character and spirited fortitude to get through, I've never really experienced it. I am talking of the fear of poverty rather than poverty. It's also not exactly that, though that is also part of it. I want to tell you something about myself, give you a piece of myself. Something more than - my favorite color (blue), favorite season (winter), or favorite car (a bicycle).

The kind of poverty I am talking about is the comfortable kind. The one with the full stomach. The one in which you get to wallow in your couch and feel sorry for yourself. It is real though, in the sense that it makes you dance to its tunes, it runs around in your brain like a rat, and it also gets stuck in your throat. It is a catchy tune with bad lyrics. I got rid of said poverty, and I want to tell you all about it, this is a letter, not an interview, I promised. I started feeling it about 2 years ago. The poverty, of spirit, the kind that comes with having an artistic life, its one of the hazards of the job, you see? And then I decided to stop making things, and to start creating things instead. What's the difference, you ask? Well, I am still figuring that out. But I want to share this part of myself with you. That's what 'pen friends' are for.

When one sets off on an artistic path, if one is so lucky. Often times, what happens is that you spend a lot of time creating that thing they call a "calling card". And its true, if you manage to create that, they do come calling. And its a blessing ~~because~~ because now you can go about your artistic career, get paid for doing what you love. You can even walk into a book store and buy all the books you want. Stop sharing the Netflix password. Eat →

→ out every now and again. Go back to school, this time to talk about your work. It's nice. But pretty soon, you are making things, not creating them.

I'll tell you more, let me elaborate, allow me to share with you, an insight. A secret. No one else will say it. You read it here first. I'm only joking. What I am about to say is so simple. It amazed me I didn't know it every waking moment of my life. Truth is, I did. I just didn't know how to put it in words. But that's what movies do, don't they? They put in words or in pictures, the things we know but don't know how to say? You see, creating my first movie allowed me the space to be an artist. It is like a song in a musical, it wraps up the actor in a halo, the halo of performance. After that number, you feel like you know this person, they expressed their inner life to you. Shared something. Now it's the writer's or creator's job to take that emotional investment and make the character do something that is both logical and unexpected.

Stay with me, my dear pen friend. Like a musical number wraps the actor in the glow of performance. The first movie, the first success, wraps the artist in the glow of expectation. But like as they say, is a many splendored thing. Use it to make things and it will stand around in advance, and use it to create things, →

-and it will help you along to the next logical and unexpected stop.

I feel like I need to explain myself to you. Be more clear. To you. or to myself, rather. Because that's what letters do. The recipient is just an excuse to write a letter the writer wanted to write to himself or herself or themselves. The difference between creating things and making them, what it is, I think. - Is like clearing out some brush, planting new trees there, so that others can come play in it, they can bring their lives to it, walk away with many questions, that is creating something. Making something on the other hand is like going to the park, sitting on the swing for a bit, going down the slide, jumping in the sandpit. That's making things. It's nice. It is also the treadmill of the artist life.

Two years ago, I got back to creating things. And stopped making them. I picked up my pen again, like my life and next meal depended on it. ~~Because it did, six months later, but it did.~~ The piece of land I had cleared seemed overgrown again, I am hacking at the brush, leveling the ground... planting some trees, so people will come, bring their lives to it, sit down on the bench and take in the park that is different from all other parks because it's my park... the only way to get there is by bicycle, because the bicycle is my favorite car. "My favorite" (5)

car is a bicycle' that has a better ring
to it. I hope ~~that~~ we will remain "pen
friends" forever. I enjoyed writing you
very much, and also myself. I hope
this letter finds you in the best of
health.

All my love,

Ritesh Batra
New York, May, 2019