

Dreaming to Write

by Cassandra Hamilton

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Dreaming and shamanic journeys are great tools for writers. The very mythic nature of these landscapes stirs emotions and spurs imagination. By harnessing dreams, writers can scout for topics, make prompt lists, harvest images for language, plan projects and solve writing problems.

The personal dream journal is a great tool to mine for this work. The more stirring a dream, dream image or language used to describe a dream, the more built-in juice for a writer. Then when they take their opinionated reactive juice to the page, they can grip readers with their slant on their material.

From a dream synopsis, a writer can cull phrases that stir to make a prompt list. Separately, a writer can make a list of things remembered from a dream without referring to a dream report, then note any new items/phrases and add them to their prompt list.

I find it noteworthy to reflect on which details a dreamer remembers and which are forgotten. I think it's worthwhile to ask questions about details lurking in shadows. Sure, some details are like extras in a film. But sometimes there lurks a sage whale from deep within a dreamer's soul. Shedding a spotlight on those faint details can sometimes render a dreamer thunderstruck. Writing thunderstruck is always easy and fruitful.

The more a writer works with their dreams, the more their creativity boosts. Once a writer has mined topics/prompts, they can re-enter dreams like rooms to study and soak-in details or interview dream elements. They can, in their mind's eye, study a moment as if it were a painting. Writing from a frozen dream moment can be descriptive or inspired like Ekphrastic writing.

For guidance, a writer can pose a question to their dreams by penning the question on paper before going to sleep. Then upon waking, record their dreams and consider the dream accounts like reading tarot cards. They can also do shamanic journeys using these steps or perform shamanic journeys to interview famous writers/experts (living or dead) to gain practical, step-by-step writing advice. Or, because in dreams and shamanic journeys books and published works are wise creatures, a writer can speak directly to their own creations for council on how the creation wishes to be manifested.

It's easy to use a dream to solve writing problems when a dream shows a dreamer performing a task such as visiting a library or rearranging project pages. But a dream consisting of metaphorical images requires more effort for a writer to make connections between writing and the dream. A writer must ask questions. For example, how could my dreaming of eating four biscuits relate to writing an essay? Should I write in four sessions on this topic? Do I need four examples readers can savor? Should I tell the essay in four sections? And so forth, continue asking, until it's understood how to cook the essay biscuit.

Dreams can assist a writer to find richer, more soulful landscapes in a work-in-progress. An example of this would be an essay I recently wrote about my mother's seventh deathiversary. In the hours before Mom had a massive brain stem stroke, I effortlessly wrote after years of struggle. I planned to tell her of this success after I paused writing to walk my dogs. She was not conscious when I returned home and so I was not able to share my writing breakthrough. I described this in my essay, adding that in death she visited my dreams to provide accurate advice on my future home and relationships. In an early draft, the reader inferred I was, on the seventh anniversary of Mom's death, writing again. But the piece felt not-quite complete. Then I remembered dreams of my mother visiting accompanied by the Beach Boys' song, "Don't Worry Baby". I wanted to add this detail to the piece. I researched an opening phrase that haunted me and consulted a musician to better understand the music. Then I replayed the dreams in my mind and described how the syncopation of motifs contrasted the five-part harmonies and made waking from the dreams surreal. After all that work, I changed the essay's ending, closing with how remembering the dreams moved me to play the song—and write. Finally, I'd arrived at an ending the reader could celebrate.

It's important to resist assigning only one ultimate "carved in stone" writing from a dream. Like our life stories, dreams and their elements may find many lives in our creative work. Look how I did this now, sharing again that dream with the Beach Boys' song to impart how dreams can inform writing. Follow this advice on harnessing dreams for writing, rely on the juice from your dreams and "Don't Worry Baby".

Cassandra Hamilton is an American disabled artist/writer with traumatic brain injury and central vision loss in one eye who creates from dreams, shamanic journeys, and life. Her art reached international audiences in 2020 via literary magazines *Beyond Words* and *Beyond Queer Words*. In 2021, *Beyond Words* published her first international writing credit. Additionally, her writing has appeared in *Brevity Blog*, *101 Words*, *The Door Opener Magazine* and three *Writing It Real* anthologies edited by Sheila Bender. She teaches Active Dreaming (a synthesis of dreamwork and shamanism), including workshops on Dreaming and Writing while writing a memoir. You can contact her via www.BearDogDreaming.com.