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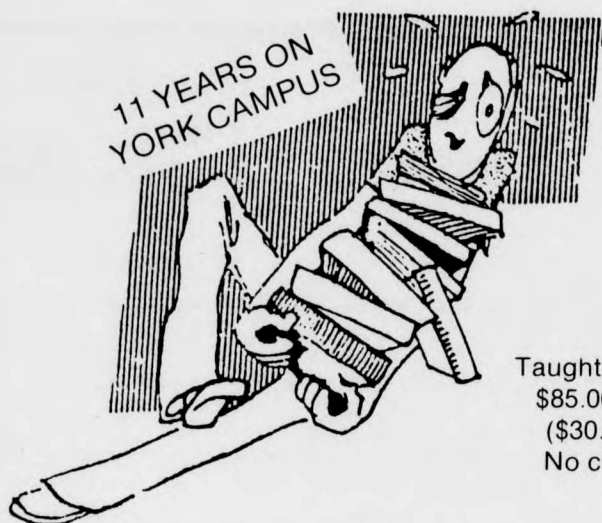
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WRITER'S BLOCK

by Ira Nayman

To have devoted my life to writing, you might expect me to be somewhat . . . different. Nothing major — a history of depression, for instance, or some drug or alcohol abuse. Perhaps I have been involved in random and inexplicable acts of violence. At the very least, I should have a few unnamed children spread over a wide geographic area.

Unfortunately, none of these great personality problems apply to me. The only things I can think of that set me apart from most people are that I never lie and I never get bored. While this isn't likely to get me a *People Magazine* cover or other free publicity, I like it.

Not being able to lie is a strange attribute for a person who aspires to become a "professional liar," as writers have been called, but there it is. Technically, I suppose I can lie, it's just that I am so tremendously awful at it: my voice trembles in a particularly insincere way; I have difficulty keeping myself from shaking; I can't keep my story consistent from one minute to the next. I'm such a terrible liar that I just can't be bothered.

Guilt doesn't have much to do with it; I simply never learned how. When I was growing up, my needs and desires were largely taken care of — I didn't have much opportunity to lie.

While I believe this is a good thing, it does have its drawbacks. How do you not offend somebody who wants your opinion on a personal matter on which you know there will be disagreement? People often tell "little white lies" in order to spare another's feelings. Since I cannot always avoid such situations, I have developed a high tolerance for the personal quirks and foibles of others.

One of the few things I have little tolerance for is — surprise, surprise — deception, especially from people in positions of authority, people we are expected to trust. As a satirist, of course, I am well positioned to

expose deception and social self-delusion.

As for the other, people have a hard time believing that I never get bored, but it is true. For one thing, I'm a voracious reader, and always carry a book or magazine with me wherever I go. Thus, long subway rides or bank lineups hold no terror for me.

Half of the time, though, I don't even have to resort to literature. The most interesting and important part of the creative process, for me at least, is the conception and development of ideas. This is an ongoing process which can, of course, be done anywhere.

(It is a process which, it should be noted, has the potential for a lot of embarrassment; when I get an idea, I have to immediately write it in a notebook I carry with me or I may forget it, even if I am in the middle of a conversation at the time. The people I talk to when this happens have the right to wonder: am I going to show up in some demented comedy some day?)

(As it happens, what I write in my notebook is invariably something my subconscious threw out at me that has nothing to do with the conversation. I make it a point to tell all my friends that they do not have to fear ending up in my writing; I find it easier to keep friends that way.)

Other activities are equally related to writing. I sometimes create characters or situations for people I see in public places, for example. This is like a pianist doing finger exercises; it is short and devoid of a larger artistic significance, but it does keep your creative juices flowing.

This is an important example of a way of interacting with one's environment, a creative way of looking at whatever milieu one happens to find oneself in. I'm surprised more people don't do it, but I try not to be surprised by anything anybody does any more.

Not being able to lie and not getting bored — Hemingway would probably turn over in his grave if he knew what passed for bizarre behaviour in writers these days. Ah, well; I gotta be me . . .

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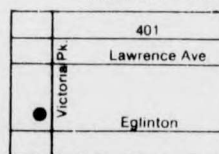
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