



Self-portrait with seagull
by Julian Herrera

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BEFORE YOU READ: What does it mean to “follow your bliss”?

The Seagull Spoke to Me

I was walking by the side of the Hudson River when a seagull got my attention. I still vividly recall what he said to me.

“Psst!” he whispered. “You are not following your bliss.”

“Excuse me! What?” I replied.

“You live by other people’s rules, not your own. When was the last time you made a decision with your heart? If you do what you love, the world will see the best of you, and it will respond with kindness and opportunity.”

“Wait! Don’t go!” I yelled to him as he flew away. I watched him until he disappeared in the sky. Then I had to sit down. I don’t know how

long I was there. All of a sudden, a beautiful sunny day became gloomy. Sinister clouds from the west upholstered the sky with darkness, and it started to rain torrentially.

My Former Life Is Gone

There is not one single day that I don't think about that moment. Sometimes you can see me running toward the seagulls trying to make conversation. I'm quite sure you are thinking I'm a lunatic. I just wish you were there with me that day when the bird spoke to me.

Sinister clouds from the west upholstered the sky with darkness.

Since I have had to lock myself in my room because of the killer coronavirus, I've been thinking seriously about the seagull's words. Now, since I am in quarantine, I don't have an excuse. Before I was always busy – working, studying, partying, or just running from place to place. I never thought, not even in my wildest dreams, that all those activities would stop. Because of the pandemic, my whole former life is gone.

Creating Art Gives Me Purpose

It was during the first month of quarantine that I took out a pencil and began drawing. Every time I thought about the seagull's question, I always got the same answer. What do I love? I love to create. I love to express myself through art. The creative process helps me to understand my feelings. When I am creating, it is easier to focus on good thoughts, and I have a sense of purpose in my life. One of the major benefits of creating art is that it calms my anxiety, which sometimes causes "panic attacks." A week ago, I had a terrible night. I thought I got the virus. My throat was sore, I was sure I had a fever, and I felt the beginning of a cough. I thought that this was going to be my deathbed because I was too afraid to go to the hospital. I even started picturing my funeral.

That episode provided enough motivation for me to start my first art project. It is no surprise



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that my first painting was a self-portrait with a seagull over my shoulder. I hung it on my wall, so when I wake up, this is the first image that I see. It reminds me to do what I love, which I learned from a bird. The bird is right.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. The "pull" quote on this page is a great example of figurative language. "Sinister" clouds is an example of personification. (The writer gives clouds a human characteristic.) The phrase "upholstered the sky with darkness" is a metaphor. ("Upholstered" usually describes furniture.) Reflect on the author's use of language. How does it affect you? Try describing the sky in your own figurative terms.
2. What surprised you about this essay? Describe the element of mystery in it and how it affects you as a reader.