

HOOPS—We all jump through them.

A series of short story bios.

In this blog I share a little about myself...

page 1 of 3 (#3 HOOPS)

I'm **Demery Matthews**. Today on HOOPS, I will tackle the topic of **The Right to Write** and the hoops we jump through to get where we are going in life.

HOOP #3

The Right to Write.

We limit ourselves. We think others limit us, but they don't. We limit ourselves. People may tell us things that feel limiting. We may shrink our lives and steer ourselves in circles, and tell ourselves that it is stuff, or people, outside us that create the boxes we stay inside. That's bullsh!t. It's true up until we are young adults. Our parents or caregivers, our guardians, and teachers control a great deal of our circumstances because we need their support. Then, one day we grow up. Society encourages us to grow up and we can't help it. It just happens. Time flies.

If you are a full-grown human. Then you are in charge of you. Period. So. Create your outcome. Even if you are a prisoner in a cell, you get to create how you react to your situation or to your surroundings. I am not saying this wouldn't be a tough thing to navigate, but there are people who lose everything in their life, and they still get to decide how to respond. They get to see what fate has in store for them.

Most of us are far better off, in terms of position than someone like Nelson Mandela was in the 1960s-80s when he was imprisoned for 27 years for opposing South Africa's apartheid laws. Ask yourself what have you been doing for the last 27 years? Upon release he went on to negotiate the country's first multiracial elections, receive hundreds of awards (including the Nobel Peace Prize), and then serve as Africa's first black President.

Another real-life story to help us acknowledge the leg-up many of us have in this world is that of Louis Zamperini. An American Olympic runner and WWII lieutenant, he survived 47 days adrift in a lifeboat after his plane crashed into the Pacific. He was then captured and tortured as a prison-of-war and had to labor in horrendous conditions. Upon release, he faced post-traumatic stress but, in the end, he overcame his hardships and devoted his time to helping at-risk youths.

How about Malala Yousafzai? Only a young girl when she was nearly assassinated in retaliation for defying the Taliban in Pakistan, her demand that girls be allowed to receive an education resulted in her being shot in the head. She survived and, despite a continued threat, became a prominent activist for female education. She is another Nobel Peace Prize winner (the world's youngest).

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Page 2 of 3 (#3 HOOPS)

These people recovered from the most limiting of circumstances. They pushed forward, past their suffering, to expand into bright futures. They light the way.

You might remember from my second HOOPS installment, I had to get over the limits I set on myself around believing I was not qualified to write. I didn't have a literature degree and even worse, I wasn't very well read. How could I write? When I did, I did so in secret. I hid my writing for a long time—even from my husband who would have encouraged me.

*I should be taking care of the children. I should be working on one of my client's projects so I can invoice and earn money for our family. The house is a mess. I should clean it. We need to eat and it's up to me to get to the store, feed people, wash little hands and feet or at least f*cking take care of myself. But there is no time for that. If I can't even get a haircut, I should not be writing. I should not be in this room while our hard-earned money goes to a sitter for the boys. Who am I to think I have anything important to write about. I wrote that thing I thought was funny, but I was just having the tired jollies. It wasn't funny. Not really. But, remember how it felt when I was writing it? I was laughing my butt off. Maybe I just don't care that much about my hair when I can sit at my computer and crack myself up instead. But I do care about my family. I love them and want to be with them.*

So, I wrote in fits and bursts. I wrote with great motivation and inspiration and then I put whatever I wrote away. It was just a hobby. At some point I finally stopped hiding it from everyone and took ownership of this thing I love. I slowly began allowing my light to shine.

But there really were a lot of responsibilities and I decided to manage those first. I do not regret focusing the first half of my life on my architectural career, my husband, our kids, our friends, and our folks. We traveled lots too, and I gave seemingly endless hours volunteering at my kids' elementary school. That was a major time suck yet I loved it.

So, was it time or was it permission I required? Maybe both. And one day I discovered I had both. I had freed myself from my own prison. Not that I view the first fifty years of my life as anything close to a prison sentence. No. I am proud of how I spent time and I am proud of my outcomes. I achieved many goals. It is just I wanted more. I wanted to write. And it wasn't a priority until I made it one.

And who did I think would give me the right to write? Did I need to spend money to get the degree? Was that the hoop I needed to clear? Given the fact I never finished all those architectural licensing exams, how long do you suppose I honestly considered going back to school to become a writer?

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Page 3 of 3 (#3 HOOPS)

That long. I didn't truly consider it at all. Instead, I just started writing. I didn't know her name at first either—my heroine. I don't remember when she told me her name or when I learned it's meaning, but I was in that boat with her and I became her. Then I became everyone around her. I even became everyone around them.

I didn't need to know how to write to get started. I hadn't yet taken a single writing class. I didn't even need to know where the boat was heading. I would go back and edit as I made discoveries. I would find out my heroine's name and I would decide when to fill in all the gaps for my reader. I would take one barefoot step at a time. Bare. That is what I was. It was a remarkably vulnerable experience writing *Weapons of Wyn*. And, I am still naked and exposed. I will have to get used to it. That was the f*cking hoop. Vulnerability. I gave myself permission and thus would have only myself to blame if I got ridiculed. I wrote anyway.

Do I know the endings to my stories when I start writing them? Nope. Do I have to do tons of research? F*ck. I majored in architecture and created a life designing homes and raising my sons. Do you think I had a clue about Anglo-Saxon and early Scandinavian history? Nope. How about farming? Sailing? What did they wear? Eat? Was anyone educated back then? What would they have called themselves and each other? What would they have known about each other? Did I research? Not only did I research, I never stopped. And I love it. In terms of history, I don't even know half of the big picture but that is going to have to be okay because at least I know more than when I started, and I have learned enough to base my stories in accuracy.

But how does one structure a story? How do I establish the best point of view? How do I revise that point of view and develop my characters? How do I manage dialogue? How? How? And what about the publishing industry? Well I am still learning. I am still clearing hoops. But if I had waited to start writing before I began learning, then I wouldn't have the story that became my reason to do all the work.

I gave myself the right to write. And then the story gave me the strength to develop the skills, to seek the answers, to clear the hoops that make me nervous and keep me so f*cking naked that it hurts sometimes. And I love it.

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This was the third installment of “HOOPS—We all jump through them.” Thank you for taking time to read.