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IN THE MUPPLE WITH THE LIBRARY WRITER

Hi again, friend!

Thanks for joining me for this glimpse into the muddy middle of a writer's journey from reader to author.

Living A Good Story

Theoretically, this is the space where I focus on literary things and the writing world, but that's not where we're going to start today. To be honest, writing has

been lower on my priority list than usual. The past 6 weeks here have been all about *living* a good story, or to use Ben Franklin's phrasing, doing "something worth writing." And this was *supposed* to be the September edition of my monthlyish letter, but since it's now October 3rd, I guess we'll just call it the first fall edition! In this month's Muddle, I'll share news about TWO new additions to my family and give you a sneak peek of the new *edition* of my current novel-in-progress. Sound like a plan? Read on!

"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."

Benjamin Franklin

Find out what makes you kinder, what opens you up and brings out the most loving, generous, and unafraid version of yourself- and go after those things as if nothing else matters. Because, actually, nothing else does. - George Saunders **

The Babies



The biggest news is, I am now a full-time foster parent to two toddlers! If that seems like a lot in addition to working on my novel, running a small but busy **communications firm**, and co-managing **our regenerative farm** with my husband, well-- it is!

Does it make any sense at all? No!

Am I completely crazy?

That seems obvious at this point.

So here's what happened:

About a year ago, my husband and I were on a date at the Harbor Springs Farmers Market (best date spot ever, fyi). A volunteer had set up a booth to recruit foster parents. We told her we've always talked about fostering once our own kids were out of the house, but not yet. She told us of our community's desperate need for respite foster parents just to give other foster parents a break when needed. Of course, we said yes, and over the last year, we've hosted teens and a spunky preschooler for "farmstays" during big holidays, long weekends, and daycare crises.

Being a respite provider required us to go through the state's full licensing process, and as a licensed home we received many calls for emergency and long-term placements as well as respite care. The stories of these resilient kids in need kept echoing in my heart, which started to feel a little hollow. Waiting until our kids were grown began to look like the wrong timeline. The need for foster families is huge in our region, and I know even greater in more urban areas. Abuse and neglect exist in every zip code.

Right after we returned from our annual family vacation in August, we accepted long-term placement of two siblings, a 2-year old boy and his almost 1-year old sister. They'd been in State care for less than a month but had already been in two other foster homes who hadn't felt able to meet their special needs. The little boy has Down syndrome, and both kids have significant developmental delays. Neither has had any of the medical assessments or supports that would typically be provided.

So, for the last 6 weeks, as a first-time foster parent, I've been learning to navigate the Medicaid system at the same time I'm learning all about Down syndrome and speech delays. It's been a lot! It's *still* a lot!

The rewards are smiles and snuggles from two tiny humans who are joy in its squishy form.



@TheLibraryWriter



Biscuit (Beckon Hill Farms barn cat) making the same face I do when both babies skip their naps.

The Hard Part

I was wondering if anyone knows of a nice spa where I could check in for a little coma? Just, like, a small, maybe 3-day coma? That sounds restful.

I am so tired. These tiny human squishmallows are running me ragged. Often mistaken for twins despite being 13 months apart, they are nearly identical in height, weight, and developmental stages. They're both walking but not talking at all, so most of my time with them involves chasing them in circles and speaking with very exaggerated pronunciation. (The speech therapist said to!) It's ok, I live in the country so no one is around to see how nuts I sound or hear how whackadoodle I look.

Aside from that little benefit, our peaceful farm has a few downsides. Since I work from home, I have to spend over two hours a day driving to and from daycare so I can get any work done. (And I'm one of the fortunate few who was able to secure daycare!) And when you combine our rural location with a backlog of special medical

needs, you get a lot of hours on the phone chasing referrals and then many miles of driving to the nearest pediatric specialist in this, that, and another thing. One of our little guy's appointments this week with a specialist at the nearest children's hospital required 7 hours of driving there and back.

But oh, what wonderful people I'm meeting! So many smart people are serving our sweet babies: an orthopedic specialist who understands the hypotonia (muscle weakness) common in children with Down syndrome, RNs, lab techs, dentists, endocrinologists, special eye doctors, the world's greatest pediatrician, and specialists in all the therapies- speech, physical, feeding, and occupational (which always makes me smile because the picture in my head is of babies in hard hats getting some on-the-job training.)

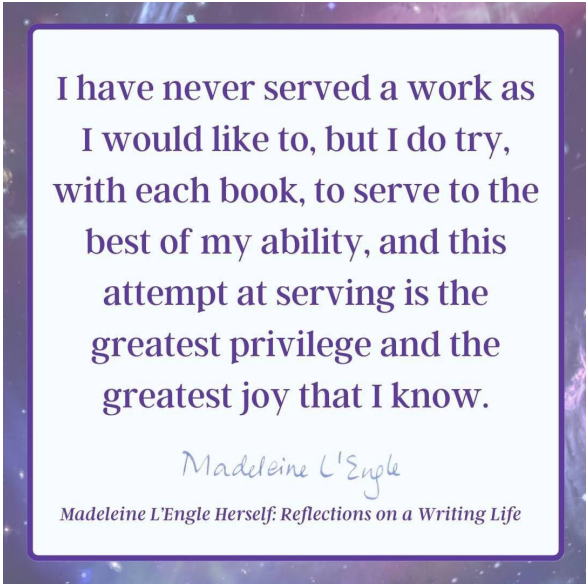
Tomorrow, we'll meet our pediatric cardiologist and that will be the last of our major checkups. Maybe then I'll catch up on sleep, or book myself a nice little coma. Let me know if you know a place!

**The world is violent and mercurial, it will
have its way with you. We are saved only
by love — love for each other and the love
that we pour into the art we feel
compelled to share: being a parent; being
a writer; being a painter; being a friend.
We live in a perpetually burning building,
and what we must save from it,
all the time, is love.**

Tennessee Williams



I've always loved this passage from Tennessee Williams. The fact that he listed parenting as an art form really touched me this week.



I have never served a work as
I would like to, but I do try,
with each book, to serve to the
best of my ability, and this
attempt at serving is the
greatest privilege and the
greatest joy that I know.

Madeleine L'Engle

Madeleine L'Engle Herself: Reflections on a Writing Life

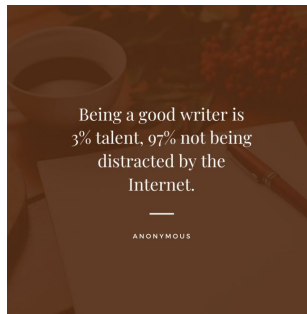
The Reading & The Writing

Despite all the upheaval of the pivot to full-time foster parenting, there has been a *little* reading and writing, thanks to the world's most supportive husband and two events I'd had on my calendar for nearly a year.

The first event was [The Madeleine L'Engle Writing Retreat](#), held for the first time this year in my own backyard of Petoskey (in conjunction with the annual [C.S. Lewis Festival](#).) I had the joy of attending this with a dear friend visiting me from Alaska, as well as several local friends. My writing cohort was led by the brilliant light who is Lena Roy, one of Madeleine L'Engle's granddaughters. It was a fun, inspiring, and productive retreat.

The second event was the annual [Harbor Springs Festival of The Book](#). It's a good thing I know all the secret parking spots in my little town, because this year's sold-out festival was held on what also happened to be our high school's very busy Homecoming weekend, complete with a parade down Main Street. Oh, and VP candidate Waltz was also in town practicing for his debate, as this [New York Times article](#) explains. The parking shortage was no joke.

My favorite moments from this year's festival included readings and discussions by the hilarious writers Catherine Newman, Rainbow Rowell, and Abraham Chang plus the authors of two of my favorite books I read this summer: Amy Pease (Northwoods) and J. Courtney Sullivan (The Cliffs). It was more restorative than a 3-day coma. Highly recommend!



The Sneak Peek

Thanks to the encouragement of my cohort at the Madeliene L'Engle Writing Retreat, I decided to post a sneak peek of the first chapter of my work-in-progress novel, *Vera's Vertigo*. If you know me, you probably already know I'm a big fan of stories featuring "found family" and I'm a sucker for any kind of redemption arc. So those elements have certainly made their way into this novel, as have my favorite themes: community, creativity, and connection.

SYNOPSIS: Vera thought her days of feeling perpetually unmoored were over once she and her husband traded the constant mobility of military life for the stability of an idyllic small town on Lake Michigan. Now that both her daughters are off to college, Vera longs to create the welcoming oasis of her dreams within the cafe she purchased just before the pandemic. Enlisting the expertise of a legendary business coach and the support of her pie-loving customers, Vera throws herself into reinventing the cafe and herself. Then a minor accident triggers a cascade of crises that threaten her dreams and reveal the character of her community.

If you'd like to read the first chapter, you can find it under "Sneak Peek" on my website TheLibraryWriter.com, or just [click here](#). I'd love to know what you think!





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Until our next huddle in The Muddle,

Heather

THE LIBRARY WRITER

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