

PERSPECTIVE: A Writer for World Peace

By GARY RUSSELL

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I am a writer for world peace. That's what I tell myself when I stare at the rejection letters taped to my bathroom wall. When I stare at the file cabinet drawer filled with unpublished book, article and short story manuscripts, I shrug and say, "It's not the money that matters; it's being able to reach people through my writing."

But now and then that conviction goes out the window. I fantasize about being the next Stephen King or John Grisham, sitting up there in my big house, rolling around on my bed in oodles of money.

It usually takes little more than a chanting session or reading SGI President Ikeda's guidance to bring me back to reality. Sure, I wouldn't turn down a multimillion-dollar publishing contract. But when the writing is not from the heart, when it is without meaning, what good is it?

When Princess Diana died last year, I thought about this question as I pored over the stories that proliferated in the press. Especially stories that said she and the three others in the car that crashed in a Paris tunnel were being chased by photographers.

Voices in the community say that the media is going too far. The press argues that it is the tabloids, not the mainstream press, who hound celebrities. Celebrity photographers claim they are just doing their jobs.

Who is to blame? Apparently no one. Out of the countless published reports I have read, not one is willing to take responsibility. The only thing going on is finger-pointing.

I have to wonder, though. For every person who blames the press, how many purchased a tabloid or other publication that resorts to such practices as relentlessly hounding celebrities? For every "legitimate" publication that said it would never print a photo of the bodies, how many printed a front-page photo of the wrecked car? And as for the photographers who chase celebrities, how many know the meaning of responsibility and fairness?

Right around that time last fall, a *USA Today* headline read, "The Paparazzi Shoot Back: They Say Cameras Aim Where Public Points." In other words, they were saying, don't blame us for stalking celebrities. We're just giving the public what it wants.

It's easy to follow a trend. "Everyone else is doing it; why shouldn't I?" seems to be the common logic. Who will be the trendsetter instead of the trend follower? Who will give something fresh and positive to those who want it? Who will step forward and say, "Enough is enough; it's time to take responsibility"?

In the August 1997 *Living Buddhism*, Takanori Endo said: "Much of the media today, because it is devoid of guiding principles, treats information simply as a commodity. The attitude seems to be that anything that attracts people's attention and boosts sales is printworthy." I should be the last to place any blame, but sometimes I catch myself doing just that. Then I take a good look in the mirror and ask, "Well, what are you doing?"

What am I doing? Working for a temp agency since my writing doesn't pay the bills. Yet. But that's OK. I'm making a living, so I can afford to write from the heart. I can write what I want, for the reasons I want: to inspire, entertain and encourage. Without sacrificing my integrity.

Sometimes people scoff at my chosen field. Why should he do something that he's not getting paid for and possibly never will? they wonder. Where is the reward?

I would be lying if I said I didn't want to make a living. But money — despite all my fantasizing — is not the key factor. Money is not what motivates my writing. The reason I

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am compelled to write is something, perhaps, the tabloid writers don't have or have forgotten.

I am a writer for world peace, and that is enough reward.

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